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AFRICANS RECONSTRUCTING AFRICA

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Introduction

This publication contains four lectures given during a symposium, which took place at the Africa Center (Cadier en Keer, The Netherlands) in March 1996. The theme of the conference was "African Communities: Their Origins and Limits". This meeting was a sequel to another colloquium which was held at the same place in February 1995. The topic of the previous conference was "Community Life in Africa: Creation of an Image for Discussion". The results of this meeting have been published already in the series "UTP-teksten" (No. 45). Both symposia were organized by the Africa Center (Cadier en Keer) and the Missiological Institute (Heerlen).

Is the, sometimes romantic, ideal image which a great number of people in the Netherlands foster with regard to African community life a projection of a dream they have of Africa and Africans? Does not this image in fact lead to an escape from the sometimes cruel realities of daily life in the African continent? These were the crucial questions discussed during the 1995 conference. This was done through various perspectives: sociology, anthropology, economics, and religion. Only Dutch participants took part in this 'examination of conscience'. Because of this the results of that meeting were published in Dutch.

What results did this meeting yield? The answer to this question can be given on the basis of the recommendations formulated by the workshops. They are to be understood just as an initial impetus to act upon. Two of these recommendations are the following:

- 1.- It is generally accepted that we (Dutch) are using images of Africa and Africans which are oversimplifying the reality. It is really essential to hold up a mirror to ourselves and development organisations, continuously asking what image one is using in relation to the Africans.
- 2.- It is not up to us to come to a decision on what kind of (liberation) theology has to be developed in Africa. Give Africans the opportunity to elaborate their own theology.

The title of the present publication differs from that of the symposium of which it contains the results, because of the challenging reflections given by the African speakers during the 1996 conference. They preferred the title "Africans Reconstructing Africa". Since it was an encounter of both African and Dutch participants, this publication is published in English.

How did the Africans present at the 1996 meeting view community life in Africa? What is their ideal image of it? Successively speaking were Dr. Mohamed Salih, approaching the conference topic from a political perspective, Dr. Mercy Amba Oduyoye from a feminist-theological point of view, Rev. Edmund Akordor taking a confessional perspective, and Dr. Bhasker Vashee from an economic point of view. The typical characteristics of the contribution of these four speakers can be found in Oduyoye's talk. She started by saying that in order to get a correct image of Africa and the Africans one has to go back to the period preceding colonial domination. Since, 'what lies undiscovered in the written sources of the Arab world and what below the sands of the Sahara and beneath the waters of the Nile in the collective memory and souls of Africans is what we were, and still are, people with a rich culture, economics, politics and military.' Speaking about limits, she

said: 'That we speak of limits is symptomatic of the view that without Europe and people of European descent, Africa will sink into oblivion. We who are Africans challenge this euro-centric approach to global history. We who are Africans can imagine Africa even if the international business world would say that representing 4% of annual global trade and being potentially rich is not enough to be counted worthy of notice.' Africans want to put an end to the division of their continent as was decided upon in Berlin (1884-1885). They themselves want to create new structures for living together. They want to reconstruct Africa in their own way, using their own sources. They want to rewrite their history themselves. And in doing all this they want to use the wisdom they inherited from their ancestors. Precisely this approach characterizes Ryan van Eijk's contribution. He is looking for the roots of the present political and economic crisis in Africa and he shows how today's problems in Africa are leading to the rise of a 'theology of reconstruction'.

Both publications mentioned here are meant for people who are convinced, or still have to be convinced of the fact that Africans must get the right to reconstruct their own continent themselves.

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AFRICA AND DIVERSITY OF IMAGES: COMMUNITIES' QUEST FOR DEMOCRACY AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE.

Dr. M.A. Mohamed Salih

1. Introduction.

Africa is experiencing an impressive transition from one-party states, military rule or civilian dictatorships to various forms of political pluralism. This drive towards democratization has evidently not been without difficulties which exerted immense pressures on African civil society as well as the state. These difficulties are not structural as some might think, but admittedly a result of unique historical experiences and struggles. I also wrote elsewhere (Mohamed Salih 1996) that during the last four decades or so most of Africa has been governed by repressive post-colonial states which in some cases kept intact elements of the colonial system of government which was neither democratic nor participatory. Yet Africa, for some reasons, is expected to develop instant democratic institutions, political parties and various systems of checks and balances. Many well-wishers have expected Africa to be readily available to adopt democratic political systems (similar or identical to those which developed in the West after centuries of struggles) within less than a decade. Many commentators, aware of the colonial experience and the post-colonial excesses of the African state continue to blame Africans for not having developed a democratic tradition from the ashes of the old despotic regimes. They also tend to ignore or forget that it took Western democracies centuries of trial and error, some are still experimenting, while others are not fully satisfied with what their democratic representatives have to deliver. African democracy should be viewed from a perspective of citizens' politics and the strengthening of local communities to take their responsibilities in the transition to democracy. Without citizen participation, and the development of a strong sense of responsible local governance, reforming the state alone will yield meagre and non-sustainable dividend.

Any attempt to compare the political situation in Africa and its peoples' struggle for political rights with what is taking place in the West is based on false grounds and on an unrealistic analogy. Not because the African societies are structurally non-democratic, but because their colonial and post-colonial histories have, by and large, been histories of non-democratic authoritarian rule. People who have not experienced democracy and internalized its values over a long period, will make errors and will have constitutional and other political crises which are part of the democratic process itself. Africans have to be given that opportunity supported by democrats who are aware of the fact that although democracy is a global ideal, it is at times more difficult to manage than dictatorship. And to manage democracy involves the putting in place of social, political, cultural, educational and people-centred institutional arrangements to enable people to be aware of the rights and obligations of citizens in democratic rule.

The political marginalization of civil society by an authoritarian state has compelled people to defy the state-centred politics and opt for alternative political arrangements outside the state structures. Political disengagement and relocation of political activities outside the mainstream national politics became a norm, with signs of political apathy and withdrawal. One consequence of this is the emergence of social movements, opposition and pressure groups defiant and at times confrontational to the state. Other sectors of the civil society have adopted violence as a mode of expressing disappointment with the state's handling of the national question. Some have resorted to "internal liberation" wars led by national liberation fronts (in

Ethiopia, Sudan, Angola, Mozambique, Nigeria, Mauritania, Mali, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Djibouti etc). Some of the second generation of national liberation wars (i.e. internal wars against an exceedingly oppressive state) from what Mohamed Salih (1993) referred to as internal colonialism (Sudan, Ethiopian-Eritrean war, the Western Sahara etc.) have continued unabated for decades.

Evidently, both African civil society and the African state are under pressure to take their responsibilities and create legitimate and accountable governance. These pressures are of at least two sources: (1) External pressures exerted by a democratically-inclined global civil society. Some global actors demand nothing short of the introduction and probably an imposition of "instant democracy", although they know that Africa has embryonic to meagre experience with liberal democracy. (2) Internal pressures exerted by civil society and human right activists who demand that the continent has to provide democratic leadership and accountable political organizations in societies with meagre to no long-term experience with modern democratic institutions and practice. In some cases, African civil society found itself in confrontation with the newly emerging political party operators and educated political elites who have no knowledge about how to manage participatory democratic institutions. Other party operators ended up behaving like civil dictators, thus infuriating democrats inside and outside the continent.

The question which I would like to pose here is what role African communities can play in expanding the current interest in democracy and human rights. What is the role of such an oppressive state structure and how could it be harnessed through the expansion of global accountability? Is there any role for citizen organizations, NGOs, trade unions, churches and mosques in the struggle for democracy? In short, what sort of responsibilities that African communities and civil society at large are concerned with during this period? The strained relationship between state and civil society in Africa and the politics of discontent which it has engendered engulfed state civil society in bitter confrontations. It is important in this connection to recognize that the emergence of responsible democratic governance requires a longer maturation period than what many analysts and democratic rights might have thought.

2. African Communities: Imagined and Real.

The common media images about Africa portray the continent as one with more than half a billion people, it is the home for about 8 % of the world population. It contributes less than 2 % of the world trade, its debt arrears constitute, in some instances, more than 50 % of total GDP, its growth rates are slow to negative and its population grows more than its annual food growth rate. It is also described as the continent of genocides (Rwanda, Burundi and Liberia), ethnicides (Sudan, the Western Sahara and Mauritania), decades-long civil wars (Sudan, Angola, Mozambique, Eritrea), refugees, famines, starvation, corruption, infectious and incurable diseases, aids and other human calamities.

Another image about Africa is that it is one of the least populated continents on earth, second only to Australia, with fertile lands, rivers, lakes and diverse biotic resources which are the envy of tourist operators, environmentalists, pharmacological industries and gene hunters. It has 65 % of the world strategic minerals (copper, phosphate, gold, uranium, platinum, manganese, nickel, tin etc), produces 10% of the world oil and more than 8 % of the world export commodities and tropical crops (tea, coffee, groundnuts, sesame, cotton, sisal, cocoa). And because Africa is less industrialized and less developed, it is least polluted and some of its intact natural wonders are least exploited, with diverse cultures, noble indigenous peoples, old

civilizations etc. Africa is rich, but its people are economically poor.

Another image of Africa often frequented by travellers, tourists, development workers, NGOs and humanitarian organizations is that of a continent of opportunities, people who are willing to work against the odds, treasure their communities and their way of life. Yet the travellers and tourists may return with stories about scenic nature, wild animals and noble savages. Development workers may return home with an image of societies that treasure their way of life so much that they are better left alone. NGOs and humanitarian workers may return home with mixed feelings and in many cases share some elements of the experiences of development workers. All of these various categories of interest in Africa share the same mission of advancing their cultures and way of life to societies which often fit in the agonizingly subtle image of a continent in crisis.

Large syntheses often obscure the details and represent a whole that is neither an aggregate of its parts, nor a comprehensive picture that captures the varieties of ways in which communities cope with their passion for life, longing for peace, anguish of the present and fears of the future. With these images in mind, I will turn to one of the so-called "developed" societies in the world and examine the overall picture. In the USA, the equivalent to Africa's image is crime, drugs, poverty amid plenty, a none caring society in which racism thrives and wealth dominates. Yet America is "the land of opportunity", the melting pot, "the city on the hill", and the land "where dreams come true". Like in the African case, it has some truth in it, but it does not tell the whole truth. There must be something originally positive from which any human society draws its strength, continuity and the ability to survive the odds. The images which we nurture are those which we choose and the choice is often informed by real or imagined perceptions.

I'm not in the habit of telling others what to do, but if I'm forced to do so I warn that I never base relations with other societies on the premises that they are "non-existent", in crisis, on the verge of extinction, at the brink of collapse, lacking in values, short of virtues and poor in self-esteem. Social and political projects which are based on these premises often result in weakening the resolve of the agent of change and misplace the direction of change. It loses sight of the pillars of strength on which a sustainable future could be nurtured. Likewise, it gives prudence to the forces that thrive on the maintenance of the status quo.

3. Diversity of Community Responses to the State Crisis.

There is nothing like an African experience. There are African experiences in every walk of life with different responses to divergent forms of intervention. African societies have responded differently to all national global designs from the colonial experience, to post-colonial rule: development or its failure, misconceived social policies, ill-planned projects, structural adjustment programmes and externally-driven democratization etc.

I could have used academic jargon to sum up the African experience in catchwords, alien political concepts and seemingly intellectual phrases and clichés. Possibly, I would have ended up replicating the same mistakes and regenerating the same images. Instead, I prefer to share with you the three experiences from three different communities in rural Africa. They may explain the origins of the three images which I have presented earlier.

3.1. Sudan.

Sudan is the largest country in Africa, with 2.5 million square kilometres and a total population of about 30 million people. The country is culturally and ethnically divided into two main divisions, the North (two thirds of the people and the land) and the South (one third of the people and the land). Until recently, the African South was predominantly animist and Christian, while the Afro-Arab North is predominantly Muslim. These marked divisions had already put their marks on the Sudanese post-independence history, which was dominated by the civil war which lasted from 1955 to 1972 and again from 1983 until today. The political situation in the Sudan has always been tense and the country oscillated between democracy and dictatorship from independence until today: The 1958 - 1969 military rule, multi-party democracy (1969-1985), socialism and a short-lived democratic experience (1985 -1989). Since 1989 Sudan has been ruled by an Islamic fundamentalist government which suspended the constitution, banned political parties and trade unions, confiscated the independent press and curtailed the right to organization outside the Libyan modelled Peoples Councils and the Iranian-modelled Peoples' Defence, a militia and security system controlled by the fundamentalists and at time operating independently of the official national security organs.

The first case is about the negative images portrayed about Africa and the war situation which created so much misery. This case is depicted from my fieldwork in Abyei, a small urban centre in the South Kordofan Province of the Sudan. The main population group of this town are Ngok Dinka, originally from Southern Sudan, but settled in Abyei since the 16th century. The Ngok Dinka are predominantly Christians, while their immediate neighbours are Baggara Arabic-speaking Muslims who migrated into the area from Lake Chad during the 17th century. The relationship between the two ethnic groups was relatively peaceful following the British prohibition of slave trade and the federation of the Ngok Dinka and the Baggara in one administrative district. The civil war in Southern Sudan began in 1955, a year before Sudan independence and continued unabated until today, with a few years' lull between 1972-1982. Ngok Dinkaland is very fertile and it was one of the main exporters of food to the semi-desert parts northward.

The war in Southern Sudan has divided the Ngok Dinka and Baggara Humr communities. The Ngok Dinka sided with the Southern-based Sudan Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA) and its political wing Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement (SPLM) which started the war in 1983, while the Baggara Humr sided with the Northern dominated Sudan Government. The Sudan Government armed the Baggara militia and used them in its war against the Ngok Dinka and the Southern rebels. The population of Abyei town increased from a few thousands to 20 000 households of refugees. The situation in Abyei was described in 1992 as follows:

"crowded with people near death, women, children, teenage boys and the elderly -many no more than skeletons- have taken refuge in a virtual Auschwitz. But more appalling still is the backdrop to the death scene - Arab merchants and their strong sons carrying on business as usual....For the past two years, Dinka found among the town's destitutes have been killed as collaborators or suspected rebels. Their throats have been cut and their bodies dumped outside the town".

I argued elsewhere that the Sudanese state incapable of fulfilling its responsibilities to its citizens as the provider of peace and order has delegated some of its own responsibilities to its politico-ethnic allies. The tribal militia which terrified innocent Ngok Dinka citizens was the creation of the state. An incapacitated state which strives to maintain the status quo is more

worried about its own survival than that of its citizens. The only way for such a state to exert its whim on its citizens is the use of power and coercion as a legitimizing institution.

The consequences of the state policies have now destroyed the lives of millions and imposed on African communities an image of hostile ethnic groups which have nothing to do but fight each other. The response of the Abyei community has not been one of passivity. People live in subhuman conditions, yet still attempt to farm, raise cattle, sing and after all struggle to bury the dead with dignity and honour. The wealth of the Abyei community cannot be measured by GDP or per capita income. It is incalculable.

3.2. Nigeria.

Nigeria is by now known to human rights activists and political commentators as the epitome of military dictatorship in Africa. The most populated country, with more than 100 million people, Nigeria was amongst the two richest countries in Africa, South of the Sahara, probably surpassed only by South Africa. Yet like the Sudan, Nigeria graduated from the British colonialism in 1960 which marked the beginning of the First Republic only to be engulfed into a military coup in 1966. The Second Republic (1979-1983), the Third Republic (1983-1992) were all marred with military rule and a very short lull of democratic breath. The cancellation of the 1992 election results, the arrest of Abiola, the democratically elected president and the execution of the Human rights and environmental activist Ken Serra Wiwa in 1995 were all reminders of the situation of basic freedom in Nigeria.

The second case is to show how national politics can directly affect small communities and engulf them in internal conflicts. This case is depicted from the small agro-farming community of the Gidan Magajia village in Illorin State in Northern Nigeria. The main ethnic groups in the area are Borgu, Hausa and Fulani pastoralists. The Borgu farming community (about 700 households) claim that they are the original inhabitants of the area. Borgu are neighboured by two other settlements: a) A Fulani agro-pastoralists community which migrated about 25 years ago (during the 1971 - 1973 drought) from Sokoto State to the Gidan Magajia grazing reserve. b) A Hausa farming village, where most of the population also migrated from the Northern frontiers of Sokoto State in search of new farming lands, after a devastating famine. The three villages have enjoyed a great sense of community. Disputes about land are solved by traditional chiefs before they reach court.

The Fulani pastoralists who took up cultivation recently were introduced to new crops such as yam, with more than 40 varieties, paddy rice and cassava. A far cry from their nomadic way of life which abhorred agriculture and described it as a poor man's vocation. In Gidan Magajia, the market days are days of collaboration. There are traditional medicine-men and women, but there are also sellers of modern medicine. There are locally made and imported goods. Men and women who pray go to the mosque and those who do not are not reprimanded. It will be a great lie to claim that there are no disputes, no diseases, no social problems or occasional rupture of relations between these communities. However, whatsoever problems they have, these problems are not more than the daily occurrences which may nag any other people in the world. The difference is a difference of scale.

The main problem for the Gidan Magajia community stems from the Nigeria Federal Government which introduced laws and regulations which foiled people's ability to interact freely and form the types of communities they would wish to develop. Those who supported the

military Government were given political favours and became the Government's watchdogs in remote rural areas. The political development itself has not been conducive to the maturation of a local democratic system of governance, responsible to the people. It heralded the development of a system whereby local governance is fashioned alongside the image of the central government operators who are far removed from the people and their social, political and economic interests. Such state-sponsored local governance is a hindrance rather than an aid to democracy.

The pressure to democratize the Nigerian state should not be urban-driven, while the majority of the population groups who live in the rural areas are left to non-democratic local political operators. Let us not confuse the need for a democratic state in Nigeria and lose sight of the fact that traditionally, African rural communities were to a large extent democratic in their own way or else their pillars and compassion for togetherness would have eroded long before independence. Without building these true senses of community sentiments and commitment to traditional local governance, Africa would have lost even its meagre contribution to the world trade and the production of 95% of its food requirements which consist of home-grown food crops. The Gidan Magajia community is not a community struggling for survival, it is a largely peaceful community which draws its strength from its shared values and sense of common responsibility.

3.3. Ethiopia.

Ethiopia plays a special role in African history. Unlike most of Africa, Ethiopia has not been colonized. It was an Empire and a colonial power in its own right. The Imperial regime came to an end in 1974 followed by an autocratic rule under the regime of Mengistu Haile Miriam which came to an end by the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front-led, Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in 1991. The EPRDF which governs Ethiopia after winning the 1995 elections has also added something unique to national politics in independent Africa. That is the acknowledgement that nationalities and ethnic groups are a potential basis for political organization, democracy, administration and development. No attempts were made to abolish organizations with ethnic names. On the contrary, the new regions were given ethnic names. Although many political commentators are still debating the consequences of the process, in my view this is a courageous step whose results should be of interest to the other African states.

The last case is from the Genet village in the Debre Berhan District in Northern Shoa Ethiopia, an Amhara community which lived for centuries in this area, with old churches, a rugged and mountainous land scape. The community observed almost all religious activities, including the many holidays (I was told about 13 a month) of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The priests and church congregations play their age old role in the community, the Sunday school was expanded to take on the role of a regular school since the Government is not willing to build one. But even this school was resisted.

Like most such communities, during the Mengistu regime, a Peasant Association was established and a committee made up of some educated young people was formed. In 1990, a year before the collapse of the Mengistu regime, the villages pooled their efforts and established a small cooperative outside the Government system. The villages bought a flourmill and used the profits to purchase medicine which they sold to patients for the market price (in a revolving fund basis). This arrangement had saved the villagers a 40 km's walk to the nearest dispensary and

saved women a similar distance to the nearest flourmill.

The Norwegian Save the Children Fund and the state in an effort to improve the nutrition situation encouraged people to harness the small springs in the area and cultivate vegetables. Instead of improving the situation, the project became a health and social disaster. The small, ill-planned irrigation project brought with it water-born diseases, created conflicts between upstream and downstream users and contributed to the drying up of the springs a few years later because of excessive irrigation.

The three cases which I presented here are of three real communities vis-à-vis the imagined communities and media images which look for Europe in Africa and not finding, scream that there is no civil society in Africa. It is these communities which have been subjected to the brutality of an alien state, with a political culture and institutions and ways of expression alien to the African communities.

While the Ethiopian political elite are interested in who should rule and what ethnic group should be in office, the people of Genet and other neighbouring villages consisting of diverse ethnic groups, mainly Amhara and Oromo live in harmony. Their market places are the same, they go to the same churches or mosques and cooperate in every walk of life. Although they are all proud of their ethnic identity, collective protection and an unwritten social contract between them as a community, they are also Ethiopians and dignified citizens. Some of the old peasant associations are still functioning with multi-ethnic leadership.

One can argue that the African communities as they stand today have some limitations. However, I'm of the firm belief that these limitations are imposed on African local communities by the African states whose orientation and political interests do not coincide with those of the African peoples. The relationship between state associations, communities, markets have been confronted by unbalanced power relations which made negative impact both on governance and government. To that extent, the so called African crisis is the crisis of the African state which is Western-sponsored, Western-created and Western-supported and maintained. The African people and African communities are its victims and not its sponsors. The images that should be attributed to the African state should never be attributed to the African people who suffered for almost four centuries under the oppression of the colonial rule and almost four decades under the authoritarianism of the post-colonial state.

4. Governance and Social Accountability.

To be sure, governance means the way state power is used in managing economic and social resources for the public good, with the understanding that responsible private interests can also serve the common public good. In the development sphere, good governance would be synonymous of equitable responsible development that would enhance the cause of democracy to prevent misappropriation of political freedoms, corruption with public funds and misuse of economic endowments. It also includes discipline in the public service and the creation of legal and political frameworks to assist citizens to exercise the freedoms granted by the constitution and international human rights conventions. To assign accountability to good governance is to assign it to the whole system of government and the state apparatus as well as the requirement that governance consists of legitimate representatives of civil society concerns. Hence, while good governance is associated with positive social development indicators and economic performance, bad governance is associated with misuse of power, wasteful use of resources,

corruption and lack of economic, social and political accountability.

In this respect, the call for democratization in Africa is in essence a call for good governance and pluralistic democratic institutions, organizations and political parties, free elections, respect for human rights and for securing all basic freedoms (freedom of organization, freedom of the press, independent judiciary etc). In Africa, there is an obvious need for strengthening national institutions dealing with accountability in a democratic sense. It is beside the point that all democratic states should ideally respect the separation of power (between the judiciary, the executive and the legislative institutions), independent judiciary, political pluralism and the right to hold the holders of power positions responsible for their actions. These institutions do not always function according to the way political scientists theorize about them. Examples of this are rampant even in the more experienced Western democracies.

In our view social accountability within the states themselves is more important, and should be given the opportunity to play a more significant role. Social accountability could be derived from traditional or modern religious beliefs, codes of ethics and social values which encourage justice and resist injustice. People's empowerment and ability to revolt, given the right conditions can often compel, but to a limited extent even authoritarian leaders to observe some form of self-imposed accountability. However, individual leaders and the nature of the state which they govern (multi-party, one party state, social democratic etc) often determine the limits imposed on the holders of political power.

Accountability is a performance related concept which implies the delegation of power or authority to an individual, a group of individuals or institutions (Governmental and Non-governmental), and to hold that person accountable for performance responsibility. It consists of answerability and liability for non-performance, misuse of the resources and powers of a public or private office. Politically, accountability is best served when legitimacy and transparency are essential qualifications for the holding of power positions. Abuse of power and lack of transparency undermine legitimacy and answerability for deeds or misdeeds committed by office holders. Breach of duty or abuse of power constrains accountable holders of political offices to relinquish authority, irrespective of whether they have power to prevent the breach or abuse. An important pre-requisite to accountability is political openness in the exercise of public authority or power. To put it in the perspective of democratization and good governance, accountability harnesses the performance of governance and assists them to develop into responsible leadership responsive to societal need and aspirations. There is no viable state-sponsored accountability without social accountability to keep in check the excesses of power by the state operators. The three case studies which I have presented reveal that there is a need to combine local and national efforts to enhance democracy with global accountability when basic human rights are violated by irresponsible dictators.

5. Bridging the Local/Global Gap.

It will be most helpful to this discussion if we agree from the outset that the drive towards democratization and the rule of law is a global ideal. The main problem is how to realize that ideal. If democracy is a global ideal, the idea of global governance will be most useful. In this sense, global democratization will result in the emergence of a global civil society which shares certain positive sentiments. By and large, global accountability is derived from what has recently been termed global neighbourhood values which include: respect for life, liberty, justice and equity, caring and integrity. Global neighbourhood values call for the need of global civic

ethics, capable of laying down clearly the rights and responsibilities of civil society and the state. These are not abstract concerns, but concerns that are linked to some well-known global concerns such as human rights, the environment, crime, drugs, the situation of indigenous peoples, good governance and others. Global conditionality takes several concrete forms including: UN resolutions backed by international law, transnational citizen organizations and NGOs working on the field of advocacy and empowerment (human rights, women, environment, poverty alleviation, media etc). These can be termed a tendency towards global civil society. An instrument which has been increasingly used to counter-check national accountability is the conditionality imposed by OECD governments and the World Bank.

The above is linked to the central attribute of modernity in global politics, with the unique configuration of territorial space as a domain of the nation-state sovereignty. But authoritarian rulers and dictators have in some cases encouraged the intervention of the international community due to their disrespect for their people's basic human rights. Excesses against human rights, including of course political, social and cultural rights, by the authoritarian regimes have often led to the destruction of the principle of absolute sovereignty. It is obvious that it is up to sovereign states to safeguard their sovereignty by respecting the universal norms enshrined in the ethics of human rights, or else international conditionality could be used to bring such states in line with global conventions and laws and regulations safeguarding the individual's and people's basic rights.

Issues of global governance are closely associated with democracy and the movement beyond the state. The main contention here is that universal political rights can co-exist with an institution claiming a monopoly of legitimate force. This reveals that the universal support for democracy is important since democracy means popular self-government and therefore looks beyond the state. The democratic state is by necessity participatory under the rule of the majority, although it commands a high degree of pluralistic identity. Good governance is enshrined and developed as part of the democratic process itself and therefore should be seen as part of a government process which exists at the global as well as the local, regional, national levels. The more the state becomes democratic and participatory, the more it becomes redundant by relegating most of its functions to civil society.

The question which has often been asked is whether international accountability and conditionality infringe on the state sovereignty as a means of global accountability. What are the political stakes which an irresponsible state should endure to abide by international norms of good governance and civil responsibility? Could good governance be achieved in states that can no longer control their own resources and where poor people may be forced to sell their votes for a meal or two?

The main critique of the concept of good governance does not challenge its desirability. It is a critique of the circumstances during which it has been advanced by the World Bank in order to hide away their failures to restructure the economies of the developing countries through the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs). There is also the charge that the Structural Adjustment Programmes have in some instances become a liability to democratic reforms. They have created a situation whereby impoverished peasants and workers can no longer sustain themselves, while the business and commercial sectors have thrived at the expense of the poor and underprivileged.

Another critique is that most of those who advocated international accountability have done little to improve the living conditions of the democratic resources which they themselves

have cultivated but failed to nurture. Some African and Northern activists have also succeeded in creating irresponsible opposition groups which proved worse than those in power when they themselves rose to power positions or returned from exile. Issues of good governance and accountability are grounded not only in an abstract notion of democracy, but the social and economic foundations of a given society.

In short, accountability is better served in an economically viable and politically conscious society where participation is not an externally-driven demand or a populist requirement for political manipulation. For any society to develop the capacity to hold its leadership accountable for their actions, that society has to develop a twin track of political responsibility and accommodation. The first is to be built on people's political culture and traditions and the second on a pluralistic system of government in which the loss of the political office transcends personal grievances to accommodate the political prerequisites of the public good.

There are discernable linkages between the global, the national and the local since all are interlocked in an interdependent system of social, economic and global governance. These values have in some way been spelt out clearly in *Our Common Future* (1987) which argues (80-1) that people-centred development should be guided by certain principles including, (1) provision of basic needs, (2) revival of economic growth, (3) concern for social justice, (4) respect for evolving cultures in each society, (5) democratization of political cultures and (6) prominence of the specific role of women. To my mind these global ideals have much in them to bring out the rights and obligations of citizens in the global neighbourhoods as vigorously as bringing these sentiments out in the village, town or city's neighbourhood. That ideal can be achieved through a sustained effort which brings politics back to the people where citizen politics is based on the positive values of the local communities.

The current debate on the need to empower civil society and strengthen its capacity to generate legitimate and accountable governance has given attention to how to reform or change leadership. Such an approach could be described as a statist approach which assumes that the reformation of the state would result in the reformation of the system of governance. Implicit in this approach is the possibility of ensuring political change by changing the state ideology or reducing the state hegemony over civil society. Although it is possible to exact change in situations where the democratic principles and ways of political expression and practice are internalized by civil society, results might not be uniform or identical in different societies.

6. Concluding Remarks.

We argue that without community participation in the making of their present and future interests, the defining moments of "citizen politics" could be appropriated by a small number of "political-actor-operators" who would monopolize the art of agenda-setting and political issue-making. In this respect empowerment through advocacy and education, are amongst some of the essential ways of assisting local communities to produce citizens emancipated from the fear of performing new roles and setting new agendas for self-development. I argue elsewhere that agendas should be advanced, with a sense of responsibility to what responsible and engaged citizenship implies at the local, national and regional levels. In our view this type of new citizenship and local governance should be conceived within the overall democratic process which should ideally assist people to discover the true meaning and benefits of positive, but self-chosen political participation. The stakeholder in a vibrant community life are the democrats

who made the transition to democracy possible and the future generations who we hope would internalize these democratic values and carry the torch into the 21st century and beyond. The local communities and civil society at large (political parties, opposition groups, grassroots organizations, churches, mosques, traditional healers, indigenous people, trade unions, women, youth, professional associations, the alternative media, etc) should be mobilized to play their role in this noble endeavour.

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ACTING TO CONSTRUCT AFRICA: THE AGENCY BY WOMEN.

Dr. Mercy Amba Oduyoye

1. Introduction.

The theme for these days of study at the Africacenter, Cadier en Keer, advertised as "African Communities: Their Origins and Limits", is a most provocative one. We are called to probe Africa's roots. 'What are the origins of African Communities?', we ask. This quest for African origins sounds strange until one presumes that what is being asked is a probe into the origins beyond the colonial paintings.¹ There is of course an urgent and dire need for this field of Africa's pre-colonial existence to be probed. Several historians and archeologists are at work. Recently this study has been effectively opened up and made more accessible by the series of videos by Basil Davidson and by Ali Mazrui's *Africa: A Triple Heritage*.²

What lies undiscovered in the written sources of the Arab world and what lies hidden below the sands of the Sahara and beneath the waters of the Nile and in the collective memory and souls of Africans is that we were, and still are, people with a rich culture, economics, politics and military. The communal memory is that we have cultured nature to provide ourselves with food, shelter, clothing and ornaments and that we have travelled round the continent trading with our neighbors. The folktales of famine and migrations could be memorials to the drying up of the Sahara and the arrivals of aliens seeking their own well-being through the exploitation of indigenous peoples.

That we speak today of limits is symptomatic of the view that without Europe and peoples of European descent, Africa will sink into oblivion. We who are Africans challenge this euro-centric approach to global history. We who are Africans can imagine Africa even if the international business world would say that representing 4% of annual global trade and being potentially rich is not enough to be counted worthy of notice.³ Indeed if this same international business world would not insist on turning colonization into globalization and do its best to have Africa conform, maybe Africa's resources could be used to support Africa's people to ensure that we thrive and flourish.

We who are African women can imagine Africa, a thriving community of caring people who do not only resist exploitation, struggle for survival, and push the margins of the quality of life for its qualitative extension, but who keep hope alive by working with utopias that are achievable. Women's undertakings reveal that women do not think that human life rests on trade alone. This is the aspect of the study that has been assigned to me to stimulate. I shall also try as per request to indicate what could be the task of Western Christians in this effort.

¹ If as the studies of human origins has it, Africa is the home of all humans or at least one of the original homes, the origins of Africans can be no where else but on that continent.

² A. Mazrui, *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*, London, BBC Publ., 1986.

³ Samuel Kobia in his speech to a conference on Africa for journalists and media people in Wiesbaden, Germany, quotes Susan George's comments in UNCTAD-World Trade Supplement and Statistics in 1994.

You have met as a community that works in Africa and with Africans. You may even describe yourselves as people who know Africa, but permit me to share with you something of my images of contemporary African women. African women and their daughters wake up at the crack of dawn or before, that means 4:30 am to 5:00 am. (Most of Africa is in the path of the sun throughout the year so we have learnt to beat the sun at its own game in order to sit in the shade when we need to or can afford to.) When women and girls wake up they sweep in and around their house, compound or homestead. They ensure there is water in the house if they had not done that the previous day with trips to the stream, well or public tap. They take their baths, eat or take a snack and set out for the day's economic activities.

They are off to a farm or a market, to the beach to meet the fishermen's boats or on a trip to the nearest market town to buy goods for sale in the village market. Or they may be off to the neighbouring country or abroad by air for the same purpose. They are working at home preparing food and other daily needs, soap, oil, clothes etc for sale. They are getting into their own cars, or any other available transport to their work place, another woman's home, an office, a hospital, a school, a factory or to break stones which they will sell for the day's food supply. They may be going to work as 'carriers' or porters at a market or construction site. They may be combing the woods for snails, mushrooms, fire-wood or for medical plants to take care for the sick. At dusk woman and girl are back at home to prepare the evening meal and to clean up. It is a fine day when they join the evening 'relax' time with hands on their laps - to sit with your hands between your legs is the idiom for doing nothing. There is so much to prepare for tomorrow's round of activities.

But it may be a special day which requires women and girls to carry their sick ones on their backs from one healer to the next, one hospital to the next. It may be a special day and they are going to a Naming Ceremony, the preparations for a marriage or for a funeral. It may be a festival day and that means even more activities. The West African woman never stops until she is too old to wake up at the crack of dawn, sweep the house and sally forth for the day's activities. But even then, she becomes the babysitter and the story teller.

So what do we mean when we talk about possibilities and impossibilities of having a constructive contribution? These women carry more than their share of making survival possible and of pushing at the edges of the quality of life to enhance what they have. Considering this question, led me to explore what possibilities for transforming the current style of life that exist for the African woman, for certainly, the quality of life cries out for improvement. I will speak specifically with Ghana and Nigeria as my reference points.

2. Constructing Africa.

There is indeed a task for all Africans namely that of constructing Africa. "Africans" never had a chance to construct a continental image, even the name of the continent was given by Europeans just as were the names of nations created by Europeans for Africans. Many West African cities bear witness to this European naming of Africa. True is the Akan saying 'Nea wahye wo ti sen no ono ara na obo no'.⁴ Having made Africa, Europeans and people of European descent have begun the process of un-making it, hence the need for Africans to construct Africa after their own sense of "utopia" and to free themselves from the manipulations

⁴ Transl.: She who fetches water from the stream is she who breaks the pot.

of Europe and North America.⁵ It is this experience of being manipulated that has led the All Africa Conference of Churches to promote a line of theological reflection which they have named 'Re-construction Theology'. There has to be a transformation of power, of structures, of culture, of religion, and of the mentalities that keep us struggling to be what others want us to be. Constructing Africa means first of all naming ourselves. Re-naming our own reality, re-defining what Africa is, will help us shed the borrowed quasi-europeanism that marks Africa or rather mars it.

Until recently, much that was written about Africa was not written by Africans. From travelers' tales to the results of contemporary research was done by 'others'. Africa and Africans were defined and described by 'others'. It is only in the past 40 years or so that books on Africa by Africans have appeared on bookshelves and books written by Africans in the heyday of slavery and colonialism are slowly becoming available.⁶ In this effort to speak for ourselves, the task has been mainly male as was the European style education policy that operated in the colonial period. What are the possibilities for African women to join in naming Africa? Illiteracy, sheer lack of time and exclusion from higher education and lack of access to the media, have kept women back. In the field of creative writing this is breaking down and the contemporary struggles of women to be visible has resulted in a growing body of women's writings.

Constructing Africa means putting out challenging images of what we are and what we can become. A definite end to the effects of the Berlin 1884 conference of "pirates", would be a worthy aim. A united Africa, organized around justice, participation and a sustainable ecology to replace the Africa divided and pillaged by "others". This utopia is realizable. We have learnt that Europe was not in Africa for the sake of Africans and that we have to learn to love ourselves. The instances of African nations at the direction of 'former' colonial exploiters will end when women get to learn about how their men use their presence in international fora, they will know what to say to them or at least to the younger generations. Transparency in what goes on in foreign relations is a basic requirement for this dream to approach reality.

Constructing Africa means building creative and imaginative political structures. Ancient constitutional monarchies in Africa, colonial dictatorship, charismatic leadership, civilian and military, western-type democracies and socialist one party states all these are building blocks for Africa's political future. Some will be rejected outright, and others will have their positive aspects siphoned off for the constructing of viable systems. To construct a system that is people-friendly and which cares for, rather than rules and exploits, is a task for the whole African community men and women alike. How much of this will women undertake? What are the possibilities?

In theory, women can participate in politics. They can vote and be voted for. Constitutions guarantee this, but where in the world do women have equal access to participation in governance? In Africa military governments do select women and men to serve as commissioners in charge of various aspects of public life, thus hoping to give themselves legitimacy and

⁵ Since the sad events of Rwanda and the botched elections of Nigeria, one keeps hearing from the mouths of Western peoples, that soon "Nigeria will be another Rwanda". These prophets of Africa's doom make their demoralizing pronouncements knowing that there is such a thing as self-fulfilling prophecies. Who will feed the arms-industry if Africans and others stop paying the Western world to supply them with lethal weapons to destroy one another? Where are the prophets to tell Africans that the only real beneficiaries of our wars are third parties?

⁶ Paul Edwards (Ed.), *The Life of Olaudah Equiano*, Harlow, Longmans African Writers, 1988. (Written by Equiano himself, with an introduction by the editor).

respectability. The possibilities exist for women to become politicians or at least to join in political debates. In recent years women have begun to constitute themselves into active groups promoting education for democracy. There is for instance a Pan-African Movement of Women and Governance which aims at increasing women's participation in policy formulation and decision-making. There are organizations of women parliamentarians springing up in Africa, for example in Sudan. The fact is that women know that they have to organize specifically to make an impact on politics and governance in the sign of hope. They have begun to revive the traditional parallel public structures in which women used to have a voice in public administration and governance.

Constructing Africa means welding peoples with a variety of looks and languages, religions and rituals, cultures and customs into a united people whose understanding of community goes beyond their particularities, a people who enjoy the richness of their diversity.⁷ It means getting people to see that the right of the other depends on their duty to uphold that right. It means a united people who recognize themselves as having one destiny, that of making Africa and all who live in it flourish. Both religion and culture would claim that they stand for and promote respecting what is worthy, that they build up the dignity of human beings and uphold it. Africans are very culture conscious and most Africans, especially women, are very overtly religious, so the building blocks are there to construct a 'one people' ideology. It may not stand for much, but we now have fashions that are recognizable as belonging to African women, they do not belong to one country or ethnic group, they are shared by all just as there are several pan-African women's NGOs created to deliberate and to find ways out of the challenges that Africa faces.

The apparels and hair/head dressing that used to be culture-coded, recognizable as belonging to the Fula, the Akan, the Ibo, the Yoruba, the Bassa or the Hausa are found throughout Africa. This Africanization of outward appearance is not a superficial gain. Beyond its function as apparel, clothing used to have symbolic meanings, some dignifying, some oppressive. Women are giving them new meaning by distancing them from particular culture coding and investing them with the symbol of "we are all Africans". Clothes can become discussion starters on culture. The food-culture is also changing, and women learning from one another bring enrichment not only to the nutrition but to the human relationships that can develop in the sharing process.

We are becoming Africans not only by these outward manifestations but by the very fact of refugee camps in Africa. From the South African camp in Accra of the 1960s to the Rwandan camps of the 1990s in neighbouring countries, we have learnt that "woyonko da ne wo da"⁸ and that "okweasea na ose wode me yonko na wonne me"⁹. We know for sure that our destinies are linked. We have learnt that we must seek the good of the neighbor, therefore a neighbor's suffering becomes our suffering. Mutual support is what African women seek to revive and relive and they are learning to do this across national boundaries.

⁷ Africa is peopled by a variety of human types, very distinct in physical appearance and who have been classified by Europeans. These classifications have been used for racist analyses and are sometimes used for fuel strife. This situation makes it imperative for Africans to shed these labels imposed by others and to see themselves as human and African together.

⁸ Transl.: A friend's day is your day.

⁹ Transl.: It is the fool who says they are referring to my friend not to me.

3. The Power of Religion.

The Africa I know is inhabited by people whose cosmic religion is alive and forms the bedrock of their culture and spirituality. Constructing Africa with this Cosmic Religion as part of the foundation, means a rediscovery of the essentials of this religion, purging it of aggressive and dehumanizing elements and enhancing its empowering and liberating ones. Africa's Cosmic Religion, Christianity, and Islam are all alive and to varying degrees constitute an orientating principle for people's lives. Both Christianity and Islam have tried to oust or suppress the Cosmic Religion and Western people, naming it pagan, more or less sounded its death toll the way Christianity did to the primal religions of Europe and North Africa. In Sub-Saharan Africa this was not successful. The resilience of African Cosmic Religion is seen in popular beliefs and cultural practices that are more honored in Africa.

Both women and men consult diviners, believe in the return of the ancestors to be born as infants. They believe in the continuous presence of and communication with the departed. Both women and men, young and old fill mosques and churches to participate in religion, seeking a way out of economic and political impasse. Women are religion's most faithful clients, but in what other way do women participate in religion? What are the possibilities and how do women use these? These and many other socio-cultural and religio-cultural aspects of African women's lives cry out for investigation by African women themselves. Women's presence in the formal structures of religion is part of what gives legitimacy and continuity to their existence. But for many women organized religion is not where they draw their strength. They have their own religious canons drawn from the official religion and augmented with their own wisdom and experience that derive from the fact of being women. This women's strength and spirituality nourishes their hope and empowers them to see their way through the jungle of the economic and social hardships resulting from economic exploitation. None of Africa's religions has a strong contribution to make on economic matters and the solidarity of religious people can only be hoped for. Is this different with Christianity?

Commerce, Christianity and civilization were the stated reasons for European interference in Africa. But we now know from the mouths of those who advocated this opening up that this was done to solve problems in Europe. Now we know and we do not expect benevolence from Europe, certainly not from its commercial interests. Constructing Africa will mean different lines and types of commerce, a different type of Christianity if indeed the religion can offer liberating powers and perspectives to Africans. One thing is sure, there has to be an African definition of what it means to be civilized. It is also to be acknowledged that constructing Africa cannot proceed only as a reaction to the colonial pillage and dictatorship. The world has changed, and Africa cannot and Africa must not be swept into a so called globalization in which the continent and its people are simply consumed. It will not be globalization if Africa does not determine what Africa's contribution and benefit will be. Conference after conference has come and gone, purporting to make for fair trade and not even those in which Africans participated have brought well-being to Africans. West African women are known for their skills in trading. In what way can trade be constructed as an African venture? What possibilities do women have for re-directing their lines of trade?

4. Potential.

Like all humans, Africans have the potential to build just, participatory and sustainable

societies. Like all humans they are endowed with a potential to be generous and compassionate. Like all human beings they do have the potential to do much evil as well. But Africans do not have the potential to be imperialists or to acquire colonies. In order to deal with its "surplus population" the United Kingdom acquired new lands, built an empire, claimed that the Indian sub-continent belonged to Britain and laid claim to the North American continent. Today many do not want to hear which were the sources of Europe's wealth and which strategies it employed for its survival from a population explosion. We can neither deny this history nor can we afford to forget it. Our children have a right to know why Africa is as it is, so that they can pick up their self-esteem and find a way to live in dignity. As Africans we have lessons to learn from this, but we are yet to appropriate them. We remain starry-eyed about our European connections.

Can Franco-phone African leaders continue to vote with France even when it means denouncing other Africans and peoples of African descent and other "Third World" needs?¹⁰ What indeed is the role of France in today's Africa, and specifically in her former colonies? The "British" Commonwealth is just that in name and we know it. How can Nigerians in Holland permit the Shell company to "advertise" itself by "sponsoring" a protest of Nigerians at their consulate? What has been Shell's role in the land of the Ogoni people of Nigeria? Can Shell ever adequately compensate for the despoliation of a people's land? When Europe uses her potential to build herself up, Africans who stay dependent on Europe cannot be taken seriously. The potential that Africa has to develop its economy has to be exploited by Africans. Will women take part in shaping this development or will they continue to buy and sell European merchandise, ignoring the factor of production?

The potential to re-establish our stolen dignity, battered by slavery and forced labour, slum-dwelling and racism, began with the movements towards self-determination. In many places women joined with men in this effort, even to the extent of carrying guns. Self-determination meant getting rid of colonialism. Little did the charismatic leaders of that period realize that their nations were chimeras. Africa has yet to construct African nations. There is no nation in Africa, only the potential for nation-building exists. The diversities alluded to above, exploited in the famous divide and rule of European administrators, now threaten to tear apart the nations created by Europe in Africa. Thrown together by Europe we now have to learn to survive and thrive together. But we also have the choice to divide and try to thrive separately rather than stay together and force the demise of "the other". To say that we need wise leaders is simply to admit that we have to be wise together. What is women's role in this nation-building? What potential do women hold for constructing new nations?

There is a wide area of agreement among African women on peace, justice and human rights which when released, will be ferment for the dignity of all human beings in Africa. Today, self-determination for women has shifted to the building up and safeguarding of their own human dignity. Without the human potential, the brains and the brawn, relationships of mutuality and reciprocity of Africans we cannot speak of a future. To release the potential of women, is to ensure the unfolding of the dignity of the African. It is in this area that women have embarked on a project to construct an Africa where women and men are valued equally. It is the scope of this potential that I wish to turn to and I want to deal with it briefly by sharing

¹⁰ It was a sad day when a woman of African descent failed to win the vote for the presidency of the UN General Assembly. One of the contributing factors was "the defection **en bloc** of the Franco-phone Africans a few days before the vote..." This had to do with Franco-Argentinean relations, British-Argentine war over the Falkland Islands and the fact that Barbados is a former British colony and a member of the British Commonwealth.

with you some of what African women presented in the workshops they offered at Huairou in 1995 at the NGO forum.

5. Challenged Imposed Limits.

Workshops were presented on Economy, Governance, Legal and Human Rights, Peace and Human Security, Education, Health, Environment, Religion and Spirituality, Science and Technology, Media, Arts and Culture, Race and Ethnicity. In each of these areas women told what they were actually doing, and listed the obstacles and the successes and the strategies for the future.

That patriarchy is a global sin was evident in the African women's workshops. That women's leadership is not sought for the needs of the community except where it is exercised among women was a limitation, not unique to Africa. That gender equality is shored off with arguments about unique cultures and religious demands was expressed. This too is not uniquely African. All these are areas where the global community needs to come to grips with and in which it has to find a way of ensuring that where the dignity of a human being is concerned neither religion nor culture nor national sovereignty will be used as an overriding factor.

There were limiting factors to women's contribution that affected the Southern women more than the Northern and they had to do with economic arrangements discussed above as Structural Adjustment Programmes. For rural dwellers in the South and the slum-dwellers of those regions the obstacles are enormous and women are burdened beyond belief. I do not want to add to all that has been said about this. We shall not deal with these limitations by talking about them. We may do so if we promote the initiatives that those who live those realities are making to humanize their existence. Until we stand where they stand and survey the future together we cannot be in real solidarity. We need real voices of these experiences to convict our governments, the business communities and religious bodies. We may not convince them to change their policies but they cannot thereafter claim ignorance of their contribution to the erosion of human dignity. The arguments we use concerning the South and concerning women will one day be used concerning the North. The measure you use for others will be used for you, said Jesus of Nazareth.

6. The Role of Men.

And men, where do they come in? one might ask. Of course what I say about the construction of viable and sustainable economic life in Africa, is not gender specific. Both women and men alike face the effects of economic structural adjustments with women having to bear the burden of making life liveable for all, and especially for the most vulnerable. It has often been suggested that where men lose hold of economic means of expressing superiority over women there grows a tendency to express their presumed sexual dominance in terms of rape and the battering of women. Whatever form it takes, women always do bear the brunt of economic disasters. Nevertheless, when women express their vision of a just and compassionate community, they envisage the companionship of men, the other half of humanity with whom the daily bread is shared. The high premium women place on relationships will have them always saying, "but of course men are included, are they not our sons?"

African men are what they are because of their socialization into patriarchy, a sense of

being the dominant sex and persons to whom service is owed. To educate men means to bring them to the realization that if all they have is their maleness then they do not count for much. Herein lies the need for the liberation of men. To educate men to come to realization that women too are potential "achievers", that our common humanity impels women too to be creative. This process does not take only women who have the courage to transcend the cultural orientation towards "pleasing men", it also requires men who are not afraid or ashamed to be associated with such women especially as wives. Men have to learn to put themselves into the place of the women and they will see that to put limitations on the heights women can reach is injustice. African men need to place the challenge of white racism with its ideology of job reservation as a transparency over sexism with its ideology of male superiority and praxis of marginalization of women from power.

The new relations between women and men that have to be created, begin with the acknowledgement of our common humanity and the equality of women and men and the practicing of the same. An urgent area of transformation is that of parenting. Men do not spend sufficient time with their children. Some would not even hold a new born, claiming it is a woman's domain. Some are not even financially responsible towards their children, claiming immunity backed by selective application of provisions of some cultures or simply to "punish" the mothers. Governments and welfare systems run by men overlook this gross irresponsibility. Missing out on the formation of Africa's human resources and leaving that in the hands of women alone, to my mind is a grave injustice and a form of violence to the younger generation and an undermining of the Africa we need to construct.

Women have identified violence against women as a challenge to all individuals and to nation states. Much of the domestic and spousal violence emanates from men and takes the form of sheer physical violence which can in no way be condoned. It is not men's God-given right to brutalize women. It is not their God-given right to "punish" women, molding and shaping them to suit the tastes of men. If men would refuse to marry girls hardly out of childhood, and women who have been traumatized by female genital mutilation, they would be showing themselves as humans who are able to live with intentionality rather than merely existing by the power of unexamined norms. Listening to a discussion on FGM I was encouraged to hear African men who oppose the practice and are working for its elimination. There are many African men who do not agree with the burdens that culture puts on Africans both women and men who work for their transformation as well as for the enhancement of traditions that are empowering for women. African women expect African men to join in the fight against practices that are harmful to women's health and which often are done to please men. Maybe when they are able to work as groups, or to use the structures they operate to promote their 'private' convictions about the equality of women and men, African women will be able to name publicly the men who support women's vision of a just society. There exist in Africa, men who put a high premium on just relations and who would share women's horror at realizing that some women expect to be battered by their husbands.

Equality under the law, should include equal share in heritage and of inheritance by men and women. The extra responsibility of motherhood should be translated into special resources and other provisions and men should see this as justice. Since the majority of Africa's law-makers and its administrators are men it often does not become apparent that penalizing women for supplying the gaps left by death seems hardly responsible. They tend to overlook the fact that the claim that men bear more economic responsibility than women can be challenged. Women lawyers of Africa expect their "learned colleagues" to guide the governments they advise towards operating a principle of women's participation in the law reforms so urgently needed in Africa.

Equity in the new laws is more likely to reign if women are in the struggle together with men shaping the laws to govern our lives together. Again many men have been working with women who are their "learned colleagues" on various aspects of law reform. Both need to struggle to construct new equity out of a complicated maze of customary law. The challenge is to ensure that women are not given short shrift or sacrificed to maintain male dominance on the myth of male heavier responsibility.

Power-sharing has become difficult for African men as to have to unlearn dictatorial and self-serving attitudes is of course painful. The transformation of power that women seek could enable men to see the importance of service as a key element in the responsible use of leadership positions. Empowering women to succeed in their many critical and laudable life-sustaining projects is a duty expected of African men. To be afraid of women, not to trust women, to exclude women, to treat women with contempt, to patronize women, are all signs of the insecurity of men afraid to be simply human.

To be human together is a project in the hands of the whole of humanity. We have resources to discern from our religions and cultures and philosophies to help us do this together. Very often these resources are left to die dormant because what they require does not suit those who benefit from the status-quo. Given the experience that the structures created to sustain injustice, domination and exploitation have landed us with a polluted earth, a polluted environment and polluted human relations we have no choice but to seek transformation. So women's call is to the whole of humanity, male and female, to abandon patriarchy.

7. And Western Churches?

The term Western churches is used to designate the churches whose antiquity is rooted in the ancient Western church which grew in the part of the Roman empire that had Rome as its capital. It was a latin-speaking church, distinct from the Greek-speaking church in the eastern Roman empire whose capital was Constantinople/Istanbul. There are churches in Africa whose community lies in the east but they are an indigenous African Christianity. They are not off-springs of Western churches. Western churches in Africa include those with American ancestry, who are themselves of Western European descent. We are using the term to cover both "Roman Catholic" and "Protestant" churches. These remarks, therefore exclude the AICs, churches initiated and instituted by Africans following the European colonization of Africa. The final subject of our investigation is the role of churches in the West in the efforts towards constructing an Africa that Africans will cherish and which will contribute to the global efforts towards peace with justice and a sustainable world economy that respects the integrity of the environment. I am also assuming that these churches in the West will be in partnership with their counterparts in Africa, respecting the paradigm shift in mission. The era of paternalism must be seen to be over.

First the West needs to accept that the agency of this enterprise is African and should not attempt to highjack African efforts to construct Africa. Western Christianity ought to learn from the failure of inculturation from above, expected to be executed at the command of authorities of the churches. The attempt to impose Latin-American style Basic Christian Communities on Africa did not meet with success, as it was alien to most of the African contexts. Further, the resilience of African beliefs and practices after years of heavy-handed westernization, ought to tell the churches in the West that paternalistic attitudes must be overcome.

Churches in the West that seek to collaborate with African efforts and to stand in solidarity with Africans in their struggles, have to be themselves examples of some of what Africa seeks to become. Working as the one ecumenical movement in Africa, they could demonstrate what unity in diversity means in practice. The era of competing Christian missions is over, but we have to be determined to work together and promote ecumenism in Africa as a workable paradigm for life in community. We need to have churches speaking together and acting together if they are to be a moral force in an Africa trying to work at diversity so that they do not become the source of rancor and division.

Christian churches are known in Africa for coming to the aid of Africans in periods of dire need both those created by human beings in their irrationality, and those arising from the amoral workings of nature. Working alongside African churches in these efforts will underline our theology of the One Body. Suffering together with "the Other", makes "the Other" one with the self. It is not charity, in the sense of 'good' done from a superior position, it belongs to the very nature of the Church. It is a way of demonstrating that human beings have to be bound together in a net-work of mutual support. The call for the churches of the West to be alongside Africans at work in the task of construction means providing means to enhance the charisma of Africans and empower them in their efforts to be constructive. To help Africans help themselves is the meaning of empowerment. That is what women ask of churches and nation states.

African women need global voices against the violation of the vulnerable in Africa. Questions have to be raised in the global arena on the equality of women and men. Means have to be secured to make provision against the violation of women's human rights. All human rights have to become justiciable. Can churches create moral grounds for the promotion and monitoring of human rights world-wide? Could churches take part in human rights education? Could churches support to and advocate for women's efforts to transform unjust structures and to seek a reversal of militarism and other agents of death?

In all these areas there very practical material and pastoral support have to be envisaged. But prescribing cures and dosages in a conference paper is simply to say that there is a whole area of conversation that needs to happen between specific churches in Africa and specific churches in the West. All our words come to nought if there is no dialogue on the situation we seek to affect with the gospel perspectives.

8. Summary and Discussion Starters.

I have tried in this presentation to respond to some of the concerns of the organizers of these days of study. I have attempted to touch on some of the contemporary imagery and struggles of Africa looking specifically at what kind of Africa, African women would like to live in. In doing this, I have used as my point of reference what African women's NGOs are involved in as demonstrated by the Forum at Hairou. I see parallel structures created by women in their efforts at participating in constructing Africa. I see the imperative for African men and governments to promote the women's agenda and visions. Speaking from the Christian community, I see the continued role of the Gospel in Africa and therefore, that of the Universal Church of Jesus Christ. I hope that through all this you will be able to discern the possibilities and limitations of African women and what they themselves seek to do to overcome the obstacles around them.

Below are three areas to "provoke" continuation of our conversation:

1. The boundaries of African nations are artificial, but African countries are not the only multi-ethnic Nation-States. It is however a fact that the OAU ideal of not tampering with the European-created borders is being breached because of ethnic tensions. Is the solution that of federal units based on language groups or that of forging one people? If it is the latter, what is the strategy for its achievement?
2. Religion, including Christianity, has promoted patriarchal structures of domination that make it possible for human beings to exploit the environment, and which fosters hierarchical dualisms of all types. Examine how this operates in the Church and especially between the churches in the West and the churches in Africa.
3. The equality of women and men and the application of human rights is challenged by appeals to religious and cultural particularity. How do we make the human rights declared as universal in 1945 become globally applicable and justiciable? Do you see the Church participating in this globalization of human rights? Under what conditions will human rights become authentically global?

AFRICAN COMMUNITIES: THEIR ORIGINS AND LIMITS.

Rev. Fr. Edmund Akordor

1. Introduction.

Very often we use the term community in various ways. Such expressions like "Basic Communities", "Religious Communities", "Economic Communities" and "Political Communities" are but a few that I can mention here. Each of these communities has its own modes of operation. The communities are set up with special goals in mind. Attaining such goals is the focal point in the minds of the members. Each of these communities are formed by people with identical interests. The survival of these communities depends upon how each member appreciates the values inherent in the goals for the formation of such communities.

The expression "African Communities" is so broad an expression that it will take ages to evaluate the specific impact of christianity on each community.

The mistake many people make about African Communities is that they think Africa is one big community. For example, a foreigner from Europe, coming to Ghana could be given a letter to be delivered to a friend in Kenya as if you can just walk from Ghana to Kenya. Africa is not one big community but thousands of communities.

It is also true that African communities have some things in common such as their attitude to birth, puberty rites, marriage, death and seasonal festivals, yet they still have some differences. These differences are seen in the way and manner these elements, mentioned above are celebrated. The values, however, remain the same. I would therefore limit myself to the general notion of communities in Ghana.

2. Concept of the Ghanaian Community.

The Ghanaian community is like a big family. The family is the heart and soul of the community. The family is also the bedrock upon which the larger community is built. Therefore, other concepts of community such as political, social and religious communities take their root from this. Thus a strong viable family has an impact on the larger community.

If there is no love, unity, understanding, support and respect in the family you cannot find these values in the community. The family, as every where in the world, serves as the cell-unit of the community. The family gives birth to life and acts as the first school for the child. Parents become the first teachers. A child living together with brothers, sisters and so forth, makes the child to relate to other people. The child learns to develop the sense of obedience to authority, the sense of responsibility, sharing, and respect for elders while he is living at home.

In these ways, traditions, belief and values are preserved and passed on to the new generation within. The Akan say "Nobody teaches a child the presence of God", this is to say they believe that God lives in each individual. It is equally true that the ordinary person in Ghana does not talk about the community because he lives and experiences community. It is not separate from the individual. For him, community is a neighbourhood in which each person knows the other and identifies himself with the other. What happens to one affects the whole

community.

3. Some Essential Values Binding the Community.

There are certain values which keep the community alive and together. The community celebrates these values. No one person is made the sole responsible for these celebrations; the whole community shares these responsibilities. Some of these are, births, puberty rites, marriage and funeral celebrations.

- Outdoorings a new born baby:

Every child born in the community must be introduced to the whole community. The whole community comes together to thank God because a child is considered a blessing and not just one more mouth to feed.

- Puberty rites:

Every child, male or female goes through a process of achieving the status of an adult. In many traditional African communities, such an event is celebrated. The idea is to make sure the young members are ready to perform adult roles. There are no special age-demands. Each society determines when a child is ready for these rituals of adulthood.

- Marriage:

Although marriage is a union between two people of the opposite sex, it also unites families. Therefore it is celebrated by the families. The whole community is invited and obliged to join the celebration. Non-participation of an individual member of the community is not approved of. Each person is expected to give his or her blessing and support for the success of the marriage because the marriage is the beginning of another block in the community building.

- Funeral celebration:

In Ghana, we say that, death is the final departure of a member of the community. Just as birth celebrations welcome, just so death celebrations say farewell. Death therefore is considered an important occasion. Its importance comes from the belief that, man goes back to the land of the ancestors and that all due preparations are to be made for this journey. Some of these preparations include depositing certain objects which are deemed necessary to help the deceased on the journey. In the burial, "the where and the how it is done" is also decided by the whole community. Of course, there are certain taboos that relate to some specific incidents of death.

- Inter-dependency in Ghanaian communities:

Support for each other is not limited to financial obligation but also in many other areas where and when the life of an individual member of the community is at risk. For example, in times of crisis such as death, sickness, conflicts, court cases and so forth. There are other occasions when the community also supports the individual members in their socio-economic needs. In the Volta region of Ghana, such a need during the planting season is called "Fidodo". This concept manifests the idea that every person is his brother's keeper. All able bodied persons contribute free labour for the preparation of the land for planting. This process of Fidodo benefits each and everyone in the community. All able bodied persons come together and clear the land one by one for each other.

- Shared values:

Respect is one of the most important values shared in all the Ghanaian communities. Children are taught to respect all elderly persons and people older than themselves, irrespective of their rank or wealth. The elderly and the adult are also given the responsibilities to nurture and foster the young members of the community. All children belong to all adults. All adults are parents of all children.

- Seasonal and annual celebrations:

These are traditionally instituted to renew or confirm relations among the members of the community. During such times conflicts are settled, tension is reduced, family ties strengthened. There is a renewed commitment to uphold the good values of the community. These occasions also bring together all the sons and daughters of the community who have travelled far and wide.

In Ghana each traditional community therefore celebrates some festival. Some of them are:

Akwasidae (Ashanti): the religious calendar cycle of forty days.

Odwira (Akan): Yam festival, celebration of the first yam harvest.

Bakatue (Fanti): Beginning of the fishing season (Elmina and Cape Coast).

Aboakyir (Efutu): Start of the hunting season (Winneba).

Teduduza (Ewe): Harvest season (Middle Volta Region).

Homowoo (Ga): Grain harvest season (Accra and Ga-Adangbes).

4. Brief History of Christianity in Ghana.

Mission activities started briefly in 1471 when the Portuguese planted the first cross in Shama. There was no notable progress till the 19th century. Missionary activities were limited to the areas around the castles on the coast.

But the upsurge of the desire of Europeans to build empires, to explore far regions and to trade enabled Christianity to make its drive into Ghana. The Basel missionaries arrived in 1828 and lived around Christianborg. The Bremen missionaries arrived in 1847 among the Ewe of the Volta Region.

The Methodists came to Cape Coast in 1834; the Catholics arrived in 1880. As I said initially their attention was limited to the areas around the castles and villages on the coast. But gradually they moved into the interior.

Schools were opened which became instruments of Evangelization. This also gave the communities access to the European culture, which brought a completely new outlook.

This certainly has its consequences till today. The members of the traditional communities were drawn out of their tribal lives into a new cosmopolitan one. In this process of cosmopolitanism, old ways which held together the collective way of life, were replaced by a process which promoted individualism. This affected the cosmic nature of the people of the communities. While the traditional communities emphasised reverence to their ancestors and to the gods they worshipped, the new religion stressed one God and the salvation of the individual soul. The new religion, therefore, made some strong impact not only just in one community but cut across the ethnic boundaries creating a different type of community especially, in urban areas.

5. Role of Christianity in Community Building.

If there are any cracks or disintegration in the Ghanaian community they could be attributed to the way the European culture was introduced to the traditional way of life through religion. For example, my experience as a young boy showed me this problem. My mother was the only catholic while the others in her family were protestants or traditional believers. They celebrated and shared many things together such as pains and joys. However, when it came to a matter of religious beliefs and behaviour there were always some tensions and conflicts within her family. Sometimes the case was between catholics versus protestants or christians versus traditional believers.

When I was in the elementary school, my mates and I played together, went to the farm together without any conflict among us. However, when my school which was a catholic school had a football match with the protestant schools, there were fights and tension among us. There were always some invisible dividing lines creating an atmosphere which could promote violence.

In John chapter 17 from verse 11, Christ said a beautiful prayer interceding on behalf of his followers: "And now I am coming to you. I am no longer in the world but **they** are in the world. Holy Father keep them safe by the power of Your name, the name You gave me; **so that they may be one** just as you and I are one."

In practical life with all that is said about ecumenism, the oneness of all faiths, it still sounds shallow and unconvincing because the dividing line is still there in the minds of the people. These are manifested in several ways even today. For example, marriage between a catholic and a protestant still poses some problems.

In Ghana, an attempt to introduce some African values into the church could create divisions. For example, the attempt to bring an important Ghanaian tradition, pouring of libation, into the Presbyterian church, has resulted in breaking up that church into two factions. The curious fact is that, just a comma, differentiates the two churches.

In the Volta Region of Ghana the Evangelical Presbyterian Church split into two groups:

1. Evangelical Presbyterian Church Ghana
2. Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana.

If there are certain things threatening the cohesion, values, stability and peace of the family through the influence of christianity, then it is because the different faiths and the religious wars in Europe found their way into the Ghanaian communities.

Mutual trust and openness: An effective soil on which a community can grow is mutual trust and openness. It is only in such an atmosphere that people can feel free to be themselves and get rid of pretence and hypocrisy.

Without trust there can be no peaceful community. Unfortunately until recently, the church has not been helpful in trusting the capabilities of its members. Little responsibility has been given to the people. The clergy has dominated in everything. As a result, they have been isolated.

The people, as a true flock, have to look to them for everything, they have no possibilities to take initiatives nor to use their creativity. The style of the leadership has been to tell the

members, what was good for them. Little was left for them to think of solutions.

Theology and doctrine have been isolated and left to the domain of academic specialists. The result was that they became stagnant and meaningless to the majority of the members.

While the tactics of Islam was to integrate itself in the traditional communities and slowly change them, the opposite was true of Christianity. Missionaries were dominators rather than collaborators.

Everything traditional was pagan. Things condemned as pagan in the past (cowries, carvings, drums etc) are now the show pieces in museums all over Europe. One cannot uproot a tradition which has been in existence for ages and replace it with something alien, especially, through force.

The process must develop from within. The forceful nature of these intrusions ended in a struggle between tradition and modernization. Many Ghanaian christians are today caught up in two worlds. Their church is favouring modernization or Europeanization, while at the same time they are closely connected with their traditional culture and religion.

The early missionaries did not permit their church members to take up traditional functions and offices. The modern African/Ghanaian churches accept in certain cases the dual role of their members who inherit such traditional offices. In Ghana there are catholics who are chiefs or stool father.

6. Personal Pastoral Experience.

The common name people use to call me is "Father". This does not mean a biological father but a head of a community, a religious one. By this I have the opportunity to interact with different people and groups at several levels. The contact cuts across traditional and christian boundaries. Apart from my liturgical duties and the administration of sacraments, I perform other functions in the community where I was stationed. My position is seen as one of the leaders in the community. Although, I have mentioned the cracks in the community created by the early missionaries, my role as a leader of the catholic community is seen as important by the general community. The community expects me to function in other ways. I was called upon on several occasions to assist in settling problems involving christians and non christians alike. Other times, I was invited to settle disputes between traditional rulers in my area.

Both in Ghana and Amsterdam, the mission house is seen by the community as a neutral and a central place where problems can be solved amicably. By doing this, there is a general belief that, "Father" being a man of God, is in the position to promote better relationship, peace, harmony and understanding in the community.

Sometimes, some of the people in the community even use catholic symbolism to attract my attention and also to link their needs to the requirement of the church.

In Africa, in fact, there are tensions among people and communities which can explode into some violent upheavals as we have recently experienced in Rwanda, Burundi, Liberia, Sudan and Somalia. In none of these situations we would say a tribe fought against its own members. In most of these situations, an ethnic group fighting for its survival mobilised to protect its

members. When communities do not have some common interest to protect they tend to fight among themselves.

In many parts of Africa, where the members in the community see that it is beneficial for their survival to strengthen their social institutions, they do not use violence to address conflicts among or between them. Tradition has provisions in the community to settle disputes amicably.

As it has been said over and over in my statement, in spite of the cracks created by both the christian intrusion and European colonization, both of which used a certain amount of force to succeed in their quest, some traditional communities were strong enough to maintain some of its own values and structures. Some other vulnerable communities collapsed under these foreign pressures.

However, as the traditional community found itself in a larger social, political economic and religious community, certain competitions which the traditional community had not anticipated and prepared itself for, made those communities vulnerable to changes which they could not control.

In my life as a priest in Ghana, it was not uncommon that groups and individuals who were not catholics used my services to reduce tension and promote peace. In those communities they still saw me as one of them and they called upon my sense of responsibility as a member of the community.

In 1992, an outbreak of fire destroyed a village in my parish called Kudzra. The whole village was burnt. The catholic leadership in the whole parish mobilised relief to the village. For me it was not surprising. The material the catholic church sent was seen as a relief, not only to the catholics but to all the people, catholics, protestants, Muslims and traditional believers. In times of crisis many African communities pull their resources together to overcome it.

In Ghana for instance, the Catholic church and the Christian council have always been the first to protest against unjust laws or incidents of government insensitivities to the sufferings of the people. Many Bishops' conferences in Africa send pastoral letters to state official in the same light. This shows the christian communities in Africa are not unconcerned by these instruments of violence and death. Most of the development and emergency help to Africa was initiated by the Christian churches in Africa and Europe. They also wanted to see to it that there was a larger pie to share.

The underlining factors for many of the upheavals in the African communities go beyond the internal control to create a peaceful environment in Africa. The African communities are facing a vicious cycle of debts and falling economic gains from their exports. There is no doubt that these external economic forces are part of the culture of survival in Africa. In fact the whole African continent is a survival community. If the pie is big enough, it is true that these incidents of social disconnection would also be reduced.

One thing the churches can do now is to follow the lead by a.o. Christian Aid in England and demand the cancellation of Africa's debt without any conditions which Africa cannot afford to pay. The church must first admit that she played a role in weakening the "basic communities" in Africa. This must then open the way for the church to see how much damage has been done and how to repair and to help reconstruct these communities.

Now there are many Africans from different African communities in Europe. Their lives are no better than those they left behind. They are also using strategies of survival to keep body and soul together. How can the church in a more concrete way see these people as part of the end result of the violence in Africa and help them? How can they, these African exiles feel that they have christian brothers and sisters around them? In what ways can the christian church in Europe help these people to return in dignity to their communities back in Africa? The key word is how Africans here in Europe can believe that you care.

THE ECONOMIC CRISIS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA.

Dr. Bhasker Vashee

1. Introduction.

The economic crisis in Sub-Saharan Africa has been going on for the last twenty-five years, with a severe depression in the 1980s, when the "lost decade" registered negative growth rates. It was also a period of adjustment of the structure of the economies. The persistence of negative growth rates brought about an absolute decline in per capita incomes to about \$548 per capita per year, with 150 million people or 40 per cent of the population of 400 millions, experiencing living standards below the poverty line, i.e. not being able to live an "active working life" because of dietary deficiencies. It was estimated that in 15 years per capita income fell by 30 per cent. Apart from personal incomes, expenditure on health and education also fell due to government deficits. Education alone fell by \$32 per capita to \$15 per capita. In some countries, like Uganda and Malawi, debt servicing surpassed the expenditure on health. The reasons for the economic crisis were both external and internal.

2. External and Internal Factors.

Of the external factors the most important was the sudden increase in the oil price, as engineered by OPEC countries in the 1970s. This triggered a wholesale disruption of the pattern of growth in the economy. Between 1973 and 1979, the price rises for oil meant a five times loss as in industrialized countries, with increases of up to 130 per cent. For most Sub-Saharan countries, which depended on 90 per cent of energy needs from oil, this represented 20 per cent of all earnings. Even weakened economies that had experienced drought and famine, such as Mali, Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia and Mozambique had to spend 35-55 per cent of their meagre foreign exchange earnings for energy imports. This dramatic rise led to the debt crisis, which remains a major burden on all economies. The promised compensation from OPEC countries for the support Africa gave it did not materialise, as recycled revenues landed up in Western banks.

At the same time as costs for African economies were going up, the export prices of most commodities fell, due to oversupply in the world markets. The vulnerability of the economy was essentially due to the fact that the structure of the economy remained the same as in colonial times, with most African countries depending on one or two commodities for their earnings. This dependency and the collapse in prices, led to a decline in the share of Africa's trade with the world from 3 per cent to 1 per cent. In addition the terms of trade declined by 29 per cent and export revenues fell from \$60 billions to \$44 billions in the late 1980s. In the area of exports Africa also began to lose markets to its competitors in Latin America and Asia, especially in agricultural commodities. Markets were lost in palm oil, coffee, rubber and cocoa. For example, 75 per cent of palm oil came from Malaysia for the world market reversing Africa's share, and Indonesia became a larger exporter of coffee than Ivory Coast and Uganda together.

The crisis in the 1980s was not helped by the anti-inflationary policies of the Western governments, who were largely conservatives in their outlook. Markets began to slow down in Western countries due to deflationary conditions and protective barriers to trade especially in the United States and Europe. The depression in the West slowed down commercial capital flows

from \$8 billion to \$1 billion to Africa.

As a result of these factors, Sub-Saharan African countries contracted an enormous debt from Western countries and banks; a debt that is increasingly difficult to service or pay back. It is extraordinary that the debt for all these countries was only \$6 billion in as early as 1970. Now it is a phenomenal \$290 billion, most of it owed to governments or multilateral agencies, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The important factor in servicing the debt is the amount of export revenues it takes simply to pay back the interest and other charges of the debt, i.e. the debt/service ratio. This ranges from 40 per cent on average to up to 100 per cent in Somalia, Comores, Sudan and Madagascar. Twenty countries, including Mozambique, Kenya, Zaire and Tanzania are now called "debt disturbed", since they have to pay back more than 100 per cent of their earnings to service the debt. This gives considerable leverage over the African economy by the creditors, who in fact are now extracting more resources from Africa than putting in. As a church source put it, "every child in Africa is born with a financial burden which his lifetime work cannot repay. The debt is a new form of slavery as vicious as the slave trade."

One of the many internal reasons for the crisis was the assumption after the advent of independence in most African countries, that the state would be the main engine of growth of the economy. In fact the state became a burden on the economy as more and more resources were diverted into state expenditure and wasted. Even aid from the Western countries went into the building of what was known as "cathedrals in the desert". This translated into the construction of large airports, statues of presidents, big highways, all of which had state involvement. The idea was that the state would provide the infrastructure for rapid industrialization. In fact the industrial base remained weak, because of the lack of technology or the knowledge base for skilled personnel. Most investment took place in the expansion of commodity production and minerals.

The emphasis on industrialization also meant a total neglect of agriculture, which in fact was the strength of the African economy. Nearly 70-80 per cent of the population still depends on agriculture for their livelihood. The emphasis on urbanization, however, discouraged many young people from concentrating on agriculture. The farms increasingly depended on women's labour for their upkeep, as men and young people left to work in the cities. As a result vital infrastructure investment did not take place, since women could not carry the burden of agricultural production and provide health and education for their families, as well. The consequence was that food production fell, and more countries needed to import expensive food from the West, where the costs of production were higher. The fact that most of the best land went into commodity production for export made the food situation worse. While Africa was exporting food in the 60s, the situation had been reversed in the 80s, with the continent importing 20 per cent of its food needs at \$10 billion. For the women on the land, life became harder as soils deteriorated and the number of dependents increased. Further, even if women did decide to invest on the land the banks refused to grant them credit, because the land did not belong to them, but to the absentee men.

As a result of these factors food production increased on the average by 1.5 per cent, whereas population grew at twice that amount. Half the households in Sub-Saharan Africa suffered from food deprivation. The effect of this decline has been the spread of malnutrition, especially among women and children, which in turn has led to the spread of diseases and illness.

The economic crisis was exacerbated by the various internal conflicts that afflicted many

countries. Though the basis of these conflicts was seemingly tribal, political factors played an important role. The idea of mobilizing support through tribal loyalties appealed to many leaders who sought power in the shrinking state, since there was no other centre for the accumulation of wealth. Tribalism assured some sort of social security and largesse through corruption. The proliferation of conventional weapons legally and illegally made these conflicts more violent. The massacre of the Tutsi and Hutu moderate populations in Rwanda was perhaps the most dramatic and horrible example of these conflicts. Similar types of violence were witnessed in Somalia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Mozambique, Angola and Burundi. In Nigeria a corrupt and ruthless military cling to the presidency.

War situations have taken a great toll in human lives, displaced millions of refugees and completely disrupted economies that will take years to recover. In certain countries a whole generation of children has been recruited as soldiers in informal armies, as in Liberia. Their role in the future of their countries remains uncertain, since many of them have lived on drugs supplied by their commanders. Rehabilitation will take years and will affect the peace time economy after the conflicts are over.

Another serious consequence of conflict situations has been the dramatic change in the nature and amount of development assistance provided by OECD countries. In the 1970s development assistance was directed to efforts at long term growth in the economy. Apart from infrastructure development, aid went to health and education and the encouragement of the rural economy. In the 1980s the aid was increasingly devoted to emergency assistance, providing medical and food needs to refugees. Resources have also been diverted to military intervention forces as in Somalia, Angola and Mozambique. It is now estimated that nearly half of the assistance to Africa is for emergencies. In the long run this will affect the economies of Africa, since no long term strategies can be followed as a result of the diversion of aid and the reduction of expenditure by governments. (see below)

The United Nations was sufficiently alarmed by this situation to call for a restructuring of foreign aid for "human development". However, at a recent hearing the conclusion was that more and more resources were likely to go to security related activities in Africa and less on development.

3. Solutions.

The aftershocks of the events of the 1970s, created the recession of the 1980s and the severe depression of the 1990s. The answer by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund was to institute something called "structurally adjusted landing". This was to support policies and institutions of developing countries that would reduce their current account deficit to manageable proportions in the medium term while maintaining the maximum feasible development effort. (World Bank 1981) This neoliberal prescription meant a reduction of the state sector in the economy and an abiding faith in the private sector to engineer growth in the economy. In addition, policies would be imposed to allow for a free trade regime and the free flow of investment. Most African countries were persuaded to devalue their currencies to allow for a more competitive export performance.

This "new orthodoxy" of development was increasingly embraced by all institutions involved in the Third World, including major governments of the West. In the post Cold War world a new rigid ideology was now prescribed for all countries that linked private growth to

democracy and freedom. As a result of the debt crisis and the continuing need to borrow, most African governments had really no alternative but to submit to these policies. The alternative was to shut itself off from the world economy and live under a siege.

The important factor in the whole exercise that made structural adjustment the pivotal policy for all African governments was the need to solve the debt crisis. In other words the debt was crucial to the acceptance of these policies by African governments. As an observer put it, "the debt crisis made stabilisation measures all the more pressing and reinforced the belief of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund that no future loan should be made available without strict policy conditions."

By various calculations Sub-Saharan countries owe some \$136 billions to the West. Most of it to governments or multilateral agencies such as the IMF and the World Bank. In global terms this is considered a very small amount, a mere 11 per cent of total Third World debt. However, to Africa it is an enormous burden. For almost 10 years from 1982 to 1992 Sub-Saharan African countries have been paying back nearly \$1 billion a month in service payments. For the most poor countries in the world this is a very large amount and involves a diversion from crucial expenditure for health or education.

Thirty of the forty-three Sub-Saharan countries have formal adjustment agreements with the World Bank and IMF, while the others have instituted policies close to adjustment. In all these countries these policies have led to the plummeting of real wages -from 30 to 80 per cent. The closure of state industries and those industries unable to compete with foreign competition, have swelled the numbers of unemployed in the cities of Africa. Unemployment levels have reached 50-60 per cent in most countries. The "down sizing" of the state bureaucracy has added to the unemployed and reduced the number of services provided by the state.

The assumption behind the attack on the state was the belief that most African economies had an urban bias; that the most who benefitted from the post-dependence economy were urban dwellers, like workers, capitalists and bureaucrats. This was possible since they were the most vocal politically and could threaten any government that harmed their interest. The policy associated with adjustment claimed that this had to be redressed and more benefits should accrue to peasants in the country side. The demand for the reduction of the state and its role in the economy was a way to achieve this objective.

The second objective in reducing the state was to encourage and stimulate the free market. This broad category included the removal of subsidies, in order to let prices find their market level, and to integrate national economies into the international capitalist system. The World Bank and the IMF advocates the replacement of the state by private capital that would flourish in such an environment and be integrated in the world economy. An important element in this picture was the belief that with the devaluation of the currency, the export sector in the African economy would generate enough resources to stimulate the growth of the economy.

These whole series of policy instruments is now being implemented throughout the continent. The immediate result has been discouraging with health and education being the first casualty. As governments reduce expenditure on these areas, most Africans are suffering major hardships. Both universal health and education have now been reversed as poor African parents have to pay for these services as part of the regime of user fees. This means that many children are not able to go to school or get any medical attention when they are ill. Schools in any case are ill equipped with no books or facilities of any kind, hospitals are without staff, equipment

and essential drugs. Enrolment in schools is down on the levels of the sixties, as more and more children join the ever increasing unemployment pool. Little wonder that crime and drug dealing has increased in most African cities. As the United Nations have pointed out recently, "Sub-Saharan Africa is in the midst of an educational crisis. This, at a time when over 65 per cent of the total population are illiterate. Seven out of ten children do not attend primary school. In some cases, three out of ten are without school places. Enrolment rates are lower for girls than boys. Most schools are run down and need rehabilitation. With no new schools being built, the situation promises to be worst in the coming period."

4. Main Problems.

Much more serious is the fact that growth rates have deteriorated in Africa compared to other regions of the world. Economic activity has not increased. In fact there has been disinvestment in Africa, because of the decline in state expenditure. Roads, rails, electricity, water and other services have deteriorated. This alone discourages investment in new industries. It also increases the division between town and countryside, as output from the farms has no access to markets.

In the rural areas, the so-called green revolution that changed the country-side in Asia and Latin America has simply not happened in Africa. People largely still produce subsistence crops for their own consumption, using livestock for emergencies, such as drought or famine. Despite efforts at land distribution, which has not happened universally, the rural sector is still extremely tradition-bound, with little development in market oriented economic activity. Despite some efforts, the economy at the village level remains isolated and unproductive.

In this structure, the economy in Africa is not growing in the areas that affect most of the population. This is the main reason for the poverty of the population and hence for the small market for goods and services. The smallness of the market discourages investment and this further restricts opportunities for employment, which exacerbates the poorness of the population.

A more intractable obstacle to the spreading of economic activity is the working of the financial system. As a result of the need to restrict monetary growth and to control inflation, most African countries have extremely high interest rates. This attracts a higher saving rate, but does not encourage borrowing. As Oxfam has pointed out in the case of Zambia, the high real interest rates required to meet short term IMF monetary targets, coupled with the removal of import protection," throttle exactly the small industries that Africa needs to nurture.

The financial system also excludes small farmers, who need resources to improve infrastructure and productivity. In Africa, 60 per cent of small producers are women, and they are by gender excluded from financial help. The policy of freeing agricultural prices to pay farmers a realistic income is not working in many parts precisely because the farmers cannot get their produce to the market, because of the lack of transport or roads. In addition the International Labour Organization points out that, "one of the reasons for the growing extent of malnutrition in Sub-Saharan Africa is related to the policy of price liberalization for agricultural commodities, and improved pricing policy does not automatically alleviate rural poverty. The majority of farmers in the region cultivate small plots of land and do not produce sufficient marketable surplus to benefit from higher producer prices. In some cases food-deficit farmers may actually become worse off."

According to a recent European Union analysis, "most of Africa is in the transition phase between communal and individual ownership. It is a no man's land in which farmers have permanent rights over an area, without legal title to it. They cannot offer their holdings as collateral for loans, because it is not fully theirs to forfeit if they default. They cannot be sure they will still be farming in the same areas in ten or twenty years' time, and so they are more reluctant to invest in permanent improvements to the land, from tree planting to soil conservation works."

5. The 1994 Prognosis from Washington.

Despite this growing crisis, the World Bank reported in 1994 that adjustment is working in Africa. It suggests that those countries that have undertaken reform policies in a systematic way are being rewarded by faster growth rates. The report, called "Adjustment in Africa: Reforms, Results and the Road Ahead", suggests that the "good news is that some African countries have improved their policies and reaped the gains in higher rates of growth." However, the "bad news is that they still have a long way to go in implementing the policies needed for growth, sufficient to reduce poverty at a reasonable rate."

The report was severely criticised in Africa, where adjustment policies are often condemned for exacerbating poverty. The Bank contends that out of the 26 countries it studied, six -Burkina Faso, The Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria, Tanzania and Zimbabwe- have improved policies the most and reaped the benefits. But in one of its more disturbing conclusions, the Bank observes that, "current growth rates among the best African performers are still too low to reduce poverty much in the next two or three decades."

Answering criticism from Africa and elsewhere, the report contends that there has not been a high social cost of adjustment, but also admits that the evidence on this issue remains inconclusive because of inadequate data. The Bank is reluctant to get into these issues and restricts itself to analysis of the relationship between reform and economic growth. The foundation for growth according to the Bank consists of reigning in budget deficits, controlling inflation, freeing agriculture from price controls and taxes, reducing trade barriers and reforming the public and financial sectors. Those countries that have put these policies into practice for the period of 5 years experienced a median improvement of 1.8 per cent point in the growth rate per capita gross domestic product and an improvement in GDP per capita of 1.1 per cent. In those countries where policies deteriorated there was a median fall in growth rates of 2.6 per cent.

Those countries applying the above policy instruments with vigour experienced the largest upturns in growth of exports and industrial production and, where agricultural reforms were undertaken, in farm output as well. In addition satisfactory progress had also been made in the crucial areas of public sector and financial reform.

But the Bank also reveals the fragility of these reform efforts in Africa. Firstly, reforms are helping to bring about only modest levels of growth - 0.4 per cent per capita during 1987-91 for all 15 countries where policies improved. Secondly, countries have found it difficult to stick with the reform process, because of political consequences. In the case of Nigeria, the policy was abandoned.

Since the popularity of the slogan "trade and not aid" the performance of African economies on the world market has been keenly studied. In fact the Bank favours policies that would

give priority to exporters in Africa, by granting them credit and imports to improve their technology. The Bank does not confront the argument that an increase in the production of African commodities, in fact have led to price declines in the international markets, though it admits to these declines in the case of cocoa, coffee, sisal, tea and tobacco. These represent half of the total exports of Africa.

The report is pleased with the growth of rural production because of tax declines and price increases of agricultural products. Since the majority of Africans live in the rural areas this will increase the standard of living for most people. The study finds that the countries that decreased taxes the most, experienced a difference in average agricultural growth of 2 per cent. Increases in real producer prices for export crops led to a jump in production. The replacement of agricultural marketing boards by private traders, who also dictate prices is considered a disappointment by the Bank. The answer was to increase the efficiency of the rural infrastructure so that farmers have access to markets without mediation.

For the Bank there is no real evidence that Africa is being deindustrialized, because of the removal of trade barriers. In fact the Bank suggests that there has been an upturn in industrial production in the countries that are most determined to reform the system. However, it admits that the evidence is circumstantial. There is no explanation of the fact that thousands of jobs are at risk in Zimbabwe and Tanzania, because of the imports of far east textiles and second hand clothes from America and Europe. One of its star performers has been Ghana, whose industrial production has increased. However, the Bank admits that this increase has largely been at the household level, which in the previous decade was part of the informal sector.

One of the most disappointing findings has been the decline in domestic investment in most of the countries surveyed. Despite a steady savings rate investment has not improved in most countries. This must be a blow to those who think that adjustment will eventually lead to more sustainable growth rates in the future. Foreign investment remains disappointing, since it is still confined to the oil sector in a few countries. Further, the slow decline in transfers from aid budgets have not helped the adjustment period, despite the sacrifices the countries in question have gone through.

In the more contentious area of poverty elevation (one of the main objectives of the World Bank) the report is extremely lacking in precise conclusions. It admits that poverty has increased among the urban poor, because of the rise in prices of essentials and unemployment. However, it contends that it is probable that the poor in the urban areas must have increased their living standards as a result of the rise in production. No mention is made of the decline in health and education services or the effects of the need to pay these services by the rural poor.

Given its aim at poverty eradication, the World Bank has been accused by NGOs and other grass roots organizations as producing a report that is, "a blend of half-truths, oversimplifications and institutional propaganda". In a remarkable statement in the report that is supposed to inspire confidence in adjustment the Bank states that, "it is a sorry state of affairs when we know least about poverty in the region when poverty is most a problem." This is an admission that the experts in Washington let alone the African governments have no idea what is happening in the villages and towns in Africa and to the people. Policy that has been determined in the West was applied to Africa, without any consultation with its people. This ultimately will be its single most important shortcoming and will lead to its failure.

6. Other Solutions.

Successive remedies have been offered to Africa in the last 30 years to resolve the protracted and deep seated economic crisis described above. They include state driven industrialization, provision of basic needs, structural adjustment, export-led growth and crisis management. According to a recent book by Michael Barratt Brown called "Africa's Choices" none of these remedies have worked and have exacerbated the crisis. This was partly because they were imposed from outside and because African countries did not have the capacity to carry them out.

It is now conventional wisdom that state inspired development has serious limitations, as has the total reliance on foreign investment as an engine of growth. The much-heralded export led growth has just defied credibility. Increasingly both Africans and others are looking at what is known as the "second economy", largely because it is where people are; this includes the economic activities of small enterprises, co-operatives, women's groups and peasant organizations. This sector, which sometimes does not appear in official statistics, has been taking on more importance, since more and more of the unemployed have become depending on it. However, the crucial elements in these activities is the degree to which there is participation by the people and the control they have of the projects themselves. Because these small scale economic activities depend on improvisation both the financial and technological inputs are controlled by the people involved.

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THEOLOGY OF RECONSTRUCTION: AN ANSWER TO AFRICA'S CRISIS?

Drs. Ryan van Eijk sma

God bless Africa

Let her fame resound

Hear our prayers

God bless

Us, Your Children

(From the song **African Hymn for Africa** by Enoch Sontoinga)

1. Introduction.

In the previous contributions the opportunities and the problems of African communities have been treated from different points of view. The thread in them seems principally to be a crisis in Africa on political and economic level. All authors, implicitly or explicitly, look for solutions to this crisis in their contributions. It is not my intention to repeat them, but only to show a connection between the several contributions. For after reading the previous articles one hardly finds a connection between them except that crisis, and that the articles, implicitly or explicitly, have as frame of reference the theme of African communities in this situation.

We have read about a political and economic analysis on the one hand, but we also find two contributions by an African theologian and an African pastor on the other. It is easy to see the link between the political and the economic articles, just as the connection between the feminist-theological article and the article about pastoral experiences. But what is the wider continuity between the latter and former contributions?

The starting-point of this contribution is that there is not only a link, but is handed over to us from the African reality itself which can be found in the previous articles. The political and economic developments in today's Africa appear to have an enormous influence on the theological and ecclesiastical developments in Africa. The article by Akordor and, especially, the article by Oduyoye show this. The keyword in all these, is the 'theology of reconstruction' from which Oduyoye makes her contribution.

As the theology of reconstruction is a theological reflection to the present-day political and economic situation on the African continent, we will first pay attention to the question why reconstruction is necessary. That's why we will look again at the roots of the political and economic crisis in chapter 2, after which, in chapter 3, we will see how this slumbering crisis escalated, in as far as this has not been said by Salih and Vashee. After that, in chapter 4, we will look at the influence all these has had on the churches, and the role the churches play in this situation. Finally we will talk about the theology of reconstruction in chapter 5, on which Oduyoye's contribution is based, and elements of which can be found in Akordor's article. This article will conclude with formulating challenges implied in this theology (chapter 6).

Beforehand we must realize that it is impossible and even undesirable to write about a continent with so many different cultures, although we limit ourselves to Sub-Saharan Africa.

But we do this because, apart from the many differences, there are also general similarities that, to a certain extent, exist in most countries of Sub-Saharan Africa.

2. The Roots of the Crisis.

A land without ruins is a land without memories - a land without memories is a land without history.

(Fr. A. Ryan)

On the basis of three specific examples Salih states in his contribution that the crisis in Africa is the crisis of the state. Vashee also speaks in his article about a crisis of the state. And this is correct. But unanswered remains the question: why the power of the state is so destructive in Africa of all places? What is the typical quality of the African state that is so destructive in so many cases as Salih and Vashee describe? The answer to this question appears to be complex. In the colonial past as well as in the African past there are elements which contributed to present-day crisis; especially the latter's 'internal' elements are sometimes forgotten.

2.1. The Colonial Heritage.

First of all there is the fact of the colonial heritage, which has had an enormous influence until today:

2.1.1. Artificial Frontiers.

It is generally well-known that today's African states as territorial unities are, almost without any exception, a result of the colonial period. Within these territorial, inherited frontiers we find different cultures and peoples. Frontiers are drawn arbitrarily and have divided people until today. Many say this diversity of cultures and peoples is a very important reason for the crisis of Africa's states: the African state is not a nation-state. Although this diversity can be a hinderance, and in several states it is indeed a hinderance, this can't be the final answer, because most states in our world have a diverse population which is made up of several cultures and peoples without such destructive effects.¹¹ Moreover, we know that in many cases frontiers in Africa only exist on the map; frontiers exist chiefly 'de jure', but often not 'de facto'.¹² So there must be other reasons.

2.1.2. A Weak Administration.

Most African countries had to fight -whether or not violently- to achieve their independence. What they finally got was not only an artificially and arbitrarily created territorial state, but also a public service which was created by the colonizer. This colonial state machinery consisted of weak or even destructive elements:

a- In principle the colonizer kept the state machinery as small as possible. The leading thought was: how to get the biggest output with the smallest input. The result was that the African states

¹¹ See S. Randrianja, 'Nationalism, ethnicity and democracy', in S. Ellis (ed), *Africa Now: People, Policies, Institutions*, DGIS/J. Currey/Heinemann, The Hague/London/Portsmouth, 1996, pp. 20-41.

¹² See J.F. Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*, Longman, London, 1993, p. 101 and M. Doornbos, 'The African State in Academic Debate: Retrospect and Prospect', in *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 28 (1990) no. 2, p. 189.

inherited a small and weak administration. The administration of the state was qualitatively and quantitatively too weak and, as a matter of fact, not prepared for the tasks which emerged after the independence.

b- Moreover the colonial system had been focused on the economic demands of the mother country. Also, the economic infrastructure of these young states was weak because it was particularly based on agricultural cash crops and raw materials for export.

c- Moreover, the colonizer, who at home was attached to democracy and good governance, ruled in the colonies in an authoritarian way, and used force, bribes and divide-and-rule strategies with regard to the local people.¹³ In short, the attitude of and the experience with colonial rule was not really exemplary but this destructive attitude was in most cases adopted by the new ruling class.

2.1.3. Shifts in Leadership.

Important to note is that there was also a social change namely in the composition of the leadership. The leading persons during the struggle for independence and the period immediately after independence came from the relatively small group of people who were educated in a western way or were otherwise westernized. Precisely because of this background they seemed to be the most suitable partners to negotiate with the colonizers about independence, and in the end to be the inheritors of the colonizers. The struggle for independence gave, especially to the younger generation, the opportunity to break away from the laws of the traditional society, in which seniority played an important role.¹⁴ If necessary the traditional leadership and its structures were further marginalized.

2.1.4. Nationbuilding and Development.

After independence the tasks as well as the expectations with regard to the state were very high. National unity and development became the new keywords. In many cases this led to an authoritarian one party-system and/or a strong leader. They had to symbolize, to emphasize and to realize the (aspired) national unity.¹⁵ The national unity which was found in or symbolized by the leader or party had to be the key to development and progress. 'Development' became the most important new paradigm, and everybody and everything had to give way to this development. Development became the first national duty and task.¹⁶ But the idea of development which they tried to realize was a western dictated idea of development, and on western conditions. This idea of development, which often corresponded to the idea of what civilisation was, led to all kinds of attempts of industrialisation and prestige projects. At the same time they

¹³ See R. Buijtenhuijs/E. Rijnierse, *Democratization in Sub-Saharan Africa:1989-1992*, African Studies Centre, Leiden, 1993, Research Reports no. 51, pp. 21-22.

¹⁴ See J.F. Bayart, *op. cit.*, pp. 110-115.

¹⁵ 'Africa's leaders consciously aim to build nations on the foundation of the existing states. While for the absolute monarchs of Europe, the nation-state was a product or by-product of policy, for African leaders it is a target of policy'.

B. Neuberger, 'State and Nation in African Thought', in J. Hutchinson/A. Smith (eds), *Nationalism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1993, p. 234.

¹⁶ See M. Doornbos, *op. cit.*, pp. 182-187.

neglected till then the most important economic sector: agriculture.¹⁷

These different factors show that there is at least a partial break with the traditional balance of power and the traditional exercise of power. This colonial heritage has led to an African state that is perhaps omnipresent, but is certainly not omnipotent, the so-called 'soft or weak state'. It is a state which is basically a 'giant with feet of clay' and which is neither economically, politically nor structurally able to fulfill its tasks as it should. It may be clear that this situation undermines the legitimacy of and a loyal attitude to the state. The conclusion which must be drawn is: 'By 1990 it had become clear that the state was the problem and not the solution in Africa'¹⁸. Because in most cases the state and its government never became the motor of development, on the contrary, it became an obstacle. 'Like the colonial state, the post-colonial state remains alien to the overwhelming majority of African populations. Almost everywhere the language of government has remained the language of the colonizers.'¹⁹

2.2. Cultural Aspects.

From the previous factors one can deduce that the crisis of the state is a crisis which has been determined by historic, political and economic factors from outside Africa, and which have caused a break in the traditional African societies. But at the same time today's crisis is also caused by a certain internal continuity, namely the manner in which in Africa people cope with power:

2.2.1. Community.

Most African societies hardly were and are class societies in which horizontal lines of solidarity within the several classes exist. On the contrary, most communities in Africa were and are organized in a vertical way and especially based on lines of (extended) family and kinship.²⁰ Along these lines solidarity gets a meaning. In this network of relations favours and favours in return play an important role. Everybody has his or her rights, duties and privileges depending on her or his position within these relations. The higher in the line the bigger the rights and privileges, but also the bigger the duties. Those who belong to a line can count on help and support by others of this line. A consequence of this reality was (is) that power in the traditional African societies was (is) more based on the size of the group and on the lines of kinship than on territory.²¹

¹⁷ See the contribution by B. Vashee in this publication. See also C. Ake, *Democracy and Development in Africa*, Brookings Institution, Washington, 1996, and J. Aron, 'The Institutional Foundations of Growth', in S. Ellis (ed), *op. cit.*, pp. 93-118.

¹⁸ G. Ayittey, *Africa Betrayed*, MacMillan Press, London, 1994, p. 306.

¹⁹ T. Dramé, 'The Crisis of the State', in S. Ellis (ed), *op. cit.*, p. 203.

²⁰ Bayart's, already mentioned, study about the African way of doing politics ascertains that the importance of kinship has decreased during and after the colonial period but that it certainly has not disappeared, and that it still plays an important role in present-day Africa.

²¹ 'The chains of ancient societies which ignored linear frontiers, and recognised each other through a right over persons, have been replaced by the wider dimension of the State, the right over space'. J.F. Bayart, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

This has had enormous consequences for the property rights (e.g. land rights) and this again for the

This is also the basis for the structures of the traditional African communities, which are often so appreciatively described. However, there is reason to make some comments on these traditional communities. Because it is sometimes forgotten that there were, within these traditional communities, differences on the basis of age, gender and wealth.²²

But even more important is the fact that organizing the society in this way easily leads to the exclusion of people. According to the anthropologist and theologian Mgr. P. Sarpong: 'The African extended family system demonstrates caring, a sharing of problems and blessings, concern, and love. People mobilize themselves to achieve a good or to expel an evil. All these are good, but often within the same community, the person outside the group is regarded as if he or she was a non-person'.²³ Because '[p]ersons become persons only after a process of incorporation. Without incorporation into this or that community, individuals are considered to be mere dangles to whom the description "person" does not fully apply. For personhood is something which has to be achieved, and is not given simply because one is born of human seed'.²⁴ From this social reality the step to ethnicity is not a big one.²⁵

2.2.2. Accumulation of Wealth.

economic relations and with especially negative consequences for women. See the article by Vashee in this publication.

The importance of power based on the size of the people or group became recently clear in the struggle between the old and new leaders of Rwanda for the refugees in Zaire.

²² See R. Howard, 'Group versus Individual Identity in the African Debate on Human Rights', in A. Ahmed An-Na'im/F. Deng (eds), *Human Rights in Africa: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, Brookings Institution, Washington, 1990, p. 164. See also J. Iliffe, *The African Poor: A History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992.

²³ P. Sarpong, 'Conclusion', in *The African Synod: Documents, Reflections, Perspectives*, AFJN/Orbis, New York, 1996, p. 224.

In the same publication Mgr. M. Francis concludes: 'We in Africa are at fault in that our view of man's social nature and consequent commitments is limited to biological relationships and maybe a little beyond. Where the biological basis for relationship is not palpably obvious, we tend to ignore the possibility or even deny any relationship. We are somewhat blind to the unity of the whole human race. Not adverting to the individual status of each person, that he is a total, complete, entire, separate entity apart from his family, we fail to recognize the basic similarity of nature, the similarity in dignity, and the equality of all humans'. p. 125.

²⁴ Menkiti quoted by J. Silk, in A. Ahmed An-Na'im/F. Deng (eds), *op. cit.*, p. 312.

In the same book R. Howard gives a description with regard to human rights which is also significant: 'The African concept of human rights is actually a concept of human dignity, of what defines the inner (moral) nature and worth of the human person and his or her (political) relations with society. (...) This notion of dignity implies a different notion of justice than does the version based on human rights. The African dignity of justice is not rooted in individual claims against the state, but in the physical and psychic security of group membership. In such societies in the past, social justice was based on the premise that responsibility for fulfilling one's role carried certain privileges - that is, privileges were contingent upon fulfillment of responsibility. Such privileges also reflected social inequality. These were certainly not societies based on rights, yet both dignity and justice were served. For many Africans, unequal allocation of responsibility and privilege according to age, gender, or social status is still a fundamental and valued way of ordering the world; and to assert their human rights as individuals would be unthinkable and would undercut their dignity as group members. (pp. 164-169) According to Howard this vision is 'typical of the small-scale peasant worldviews'. (p. 169).

²⁵ Ethnicity was particularly an ideology of the European colonizers. Under the influence of Darwinistic ideas they introduced and emphasized ethnicity. In today's Africa ethnicity has become a reality and an important political factor.

See also T. Falola, 'Africa in Perspective', in S. Ellis, *op. cit.*, p. 11; J.F. Bayart, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-59, and C. Young, 'The Colonial Construction of African Nations', in J. Hutchinson/A. Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 225-230.

This social structure was also translated in a material way: the higher in the line the more material wealth. But more wealth also meant that there were more material duties to fulfill.²⁶ This aspect is still relevant in modern Africa. 'A man of power who is able to amass and redistribute wealth becomes a man of honour. In this context, material prosperity is one of the chief political virtues rather than being an object of disapproval'.²⁷ In other words, power is legitimated by material wealth, the powerful must be wealthy and rich.

2.3. The Consequences.

This colonial heritage on the one hand and these cultural aspects on the other have influenced each other in a negative way and finally led to a destructive way of the exercise of power by the African elites. Because of this coincidence of factors power has become a struggle between several factions. A struggle which is won on the basis of forming coalitions and personal, especially vertical, networks and relationships. A financial translation of power is in this context a necessary condition because then one can keep one's duties and obligations. Power legitimates itself in Africa to a large extent through wealth; the powerful must be in the position to distribute his or her wealth.

The new post-colonial leaders came chiefly from sectors in the society which did not belong to the productive sector in this society. They belonged particularly to a group which had no or hardly any economic power, while this economic power was on the long term, a condition to keep political power. That is the reason that a political leadership developed that also tried to get grip on the economic arena. 'Political power was everything; it was not only the access to wealth but also the means to security and the only guarantor of general well-being'.²⁸ In this way a relatively small political elite developed which used, and especially abused, the economic opportunities to survive politically.

The elite consists of people who have both overlapping and different personal networks with overlapping and different duties and obligations being part of these networks. This results in a complex and not very surveyable situation, which C. Ake describes as: 'The state in Africa has been a maze of antinomies of form and content: the person who holds office may not exercise its powers, the person who exercises the powers of a given office may not be its holder, informal relations often override formal relations, the formal hierarchies of bureaucratic structure and political power are not always the clue to decisionmaking power. Positions that seem to be held by persons are in fact held by kinship groups; at one point the public is privatized and at another the private is 'publicized', and two or more political systems and

²⁶ See G. Ayittey, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-79. In these pages Ayittey describes traditional forms of the exercise of power and the several checks and balances which existed to avoid abuses.

²⁷ J.F. Bayart, *op. cit.*, p. 242.

²⁸ C. Ake, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

political cultures may coexist in the same social formation'.²⁹ And so the political arena³⁰ in Africa seems more a royal court where people try to concur, to keep or to enlarge their place by coalitions and intrigues. This also means that political ideology in this arena is hardly of any importance. Instead of ideology the business of doing politics is characterized by a certain pragmatism and flexibility. The leader has to behave like a tightrope walker and has to distribute his favours in such a balanced way that the opposition does not become too strong. The leader has to take care of a certain extent of cohesion within the elite. In other words: 'Public goods belong to the public: therefore one can help oneself to them as much as one's position permits, providing that others can profit as well'.³¹ And so in this powergame the individual talents of the leader are very important. At the same time there is a kind of continuity in this political system, because the persons and relations within these networks can change but the policy itself does not.

3. Escalation of the Crisis.

The old dies, the new is not yet born, in the semi-shadows monsters emerge.
(A. Gramsci)

But this kind of political situation does not necessarily lead to a crisis. This political system can even function until a certain level for a long time without causing such a severe crisis as we see now in most states of Africa. But there are several important influences and developments which in Africa contributed to an escalation of this slumbering crisis.

3.1. Structural Adjustment Programmes.

At the end of the 1980s the slumbering crisis came emphatically to the surface. The internal and external cry for political changes became constantly louder and louder. The discontent and turmoil about the situation was concentrated in the call for democratisation and good governance. Though this call was not new, the political unrest coincided with the fact that the economic record of the African states constantly got worse. During this decade more and more countries were more or less forced to introduce the structural adjustment programmes as dictated by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.³² These adjustments were characterized by cuts in the public expenditures. The result of this policy was that there was less money to (re)distribute, which caused that the cohesion within the elite came under pressure

²⁹ C. Ake, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

³⁰ 'The object of factional struggles is (...) not just the distribution of status and power. They also resemble the distribution of wealth, or more accurately, the distribution of the possibilities of realising a primitive accumulation, in the strict sense of the concept, by the confiscation of the means of production and trade. And because they take place against a double backdrop of material scarcity and political precariousness, the combats are ruthless'. J.F. Bayart, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

³¹ T. Dramé, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

³² C. Ake states, correctly, in his book *Democracy and Development in Africa* that the African elite bears a big part of responsibility for the crisis. The SAP's have intensified the crisis but the SAP's are also a **result** of the crisis. All the same, the SAP's seem to have become rather goal than instrument to fight the crisis. Moreover, the programmes are dictated in an arrogant and authoritarian way and benefit those who are already economically strong.

because the struggle for the more limited resources intensified.

3.2. The End of the Cold War.

But also because of the change in the international political situation, the struggle was intensified. The end of the Cold War gave way to donor countries and western NGO's to put ideal demands to African leaders.³³ Suddenly democracy and human rights were put on the agenda by the West. And democracy was strongly linked in the discussions with capitalism and the ideology of the free market.³⁴ Democracy as well as capitalism have in common that they stimulate competition: democracy in the political and capitalism in the economic arena. Two 'battlefields' which, as we saw previously, coincide in Africa. An extra problem in this context is the fact that existing or created ethnicity is used in this 'battle'. In this way ethnicity becomes a political instrument in the hands of an elite which is involved in a struggle for political and economic power.³⁵

3.3. The Release of Nelson Mandela.

The spirit of change has, in my opinion, been influenced in several countries by the release of Nelson Mandela. His release had -and still has- a symbolic meaning for many Africans. This historic event made clear that even the most hopeless situation could change fundamentally. It gave many Africans new self-confidence and new self-respect. Mandela's release had an extra dimension because it was at the same time a victory over the 'white man' and it can be marked as the beginning of the end of the racist Apartheid regime. To many Africans Mandela's release contributed to the end of a feeling of 'devalued selfworth and a notion of black inferiority'.³⁶

3.4. No Fundamental Change.

The Congolese writer Sony Labou Tansi 'predicted' in 1988 in his novel *Les yeux du volcun*: 'The people in the street started to mutter: "The time has come! Democracy is coming! We never had Authorities who were fighting for truth and justice. We have always had only duties: soon we will get rights -the right to know... the right to ask questions... the right to think loudly... the right to have an opinion... the right to refuse... the right to denounce the arrogance of the average. But the mob has always dreamed too loudly'.³⁷ The author seems to be quite right

³³ See R. Buijtenhuijs/E. Rijniers, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

³⁴ In *Democracy and Development* (Cambridge University Press, 1992) A. Hadenius concludes that there seems to be a positive relationship (stimulating democracy) between democracy and capitalism but this relationship is overestimated. On the other hand the positive relationship between democracy and education is underestimated, while education in Africa also wrestles with huge cuts because of the SAP's.

³⁵ See S. Randrianje, in S. Ellis (ed), *op. cit.*

³⁶ See T. Falola, in S. Ellis (ed), *op. cit.*, p. 8.

³⁷ Sony Labou Tansi, *De ogen van de vulkaan*, In de Knipscheer/EPO, Amsterdam/Antwerpen, 1994, p. 51. Original in French: 'Les yeux du volcun', Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1988. Translation from Dutch into English RvE.

because in many African countries the political unrest and so-called wave of democratisation have got jammed or bogged down. In fact there have been hardly any changes, for in many cases the old post-colonial leaders could, because of their position, control the process of democratisation. They were in the position to use the state's machinery and the resources to their advantage. And so many of the old leaders were able to keep controlling the political arena. Moreover, in many cases the so-called opposition proved to be divided and offered no real alternative.³⁸ In several countries this has resulted in a situation where the old post-colonial leaders can appeal to democratic legitimacy. And even in countries where a new leader was chosen neither the way of doing politics nor the economic policy have been changed.³⁹ The process of democratisation has often been reduced to elections and a multi party-system, but the character of politics has not changed. Voting does not mean that people have something to choose for, and democracy does not mean that there is also good governance. In some countries the situation has escalated into a permanent and violent situation of chaos, or the process of democratisation has been stopped by neglecting the results of the elections.

Another reason that real changes have not taken place is the fact that the basis of the political discontent has almost exclusively been located in the urban setting, and especially among the urban middle class. But in most African states this so-called civil society is too weak to counterbalance the ruling elite. The unrest seems to have no basis in the countryside (which does not mean that rural people are content).

This small basis is partly rooted in the fact that many Africans try to back out of their duties and obligations with regard to the state. In this context it is necessary to note that Africa has a certain tradition of this kind of 'escapism'. For instance, in former days people broke away from authorities just by moving to another place. This has happened in a spatial way as well as in an institutional way until today.⁴⁰ An example of this latter is the agricultural sector which has hardly any expectations with regard to the state. Many farmers have backed out of the state or try to escape from state interferences.

Concluding it can be said that in most African states the situation has escalated economically and politically. The democratisation has rather intensified than diminished the struggle. In other words, '[t]he process of democratization has generally weakened African states. (...) The crisis of confidence between society and state has intensified dramatically as a result of the democratic movements. (...) The fall or the liberalization of authoritarian regimes has led the average African to defy the state'.⁴¹

4. The Role of the Churches.⁴²

³⁸ See R. Buijtenhijis/E. Rijniers, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-75.

³⁹ As to economics most African countries have hardly any choice: they are tied to the SAP's.

⁴⁰ See J.F. Bayart, *op. cit.*, pp. 258-259.

⁴¹ T. Dramé, in S. Ellis (ed), *op. cit.*, p. 209.

⁴² For this section I used especially two recently published studies on the relationship between religion and politics in Africa: P. Gifford (ed), *The Christian Churches and the Democratisation of Africa*, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1995 and J. Haynes, *Religion and Politics in Africa*, Zed Books, London, 1996.

Don't be tempted by the shiny apple
Don't you eat of a bitter fruit
Hunger only for a taste of justice
Hunger only for a world of truth
'Cause all that you have is your soul.
 (From the song **All That You Have Is Your Soul** by Tracy Chapman)

In traditional Africa there has always been a relationship between religion and politics. The same is true for the christian churches which came to Africa with the colonizers.⁴³ During the colonial period the churches used -if possible- the opportunities offered to them by the colonizers.⁴⁴ Of course there were also times of tension between the colonial power and church⁴⁵, but in general one can speak of a more or less explicit cooperation between the two. 'In colonial Africa the mission churches by and large helped to sustain the European administrations because of shared cultural and 'civilizing' goals'.⁴⁶ In the struggle for independence most mainline churches adopted an air which varied from reluctance to rejection.⁴⁷ In many cases the independence was accepted only after it seemed to be unavoidable. From today's point of view this is perhaps blameworthy but because of the background of most -then still chiefly western- churchleaders it is understandable: the process of decolonization was for those involved a chaotic period, in which, until then, firm certainties shook. Moreover, it was the period of the Cold War and there was within the western churches a great fear of the 'atheistic, communist danger', which supported actively the decolonisation on international level. It was not surprising that the churches in and after the decolonisation supported African leaders who were well-meaning in regard to the church in the hope the new leaders would continue the relationship with and the position of the churches. Because of the close social and educational ties which existed in many cases between the potential new leaders and the churches, this was not unexpected. After all many nationalists were educated in missionschools.⁴⁸ Moreover, a peaceful coexistence was an advantage for both: on the one hand the churches wanted to continue their work and projects, on the other hand it was an advantage for the state if education and health care were continued, sectors in which historically the churches were very active. Despite this mutual interest the cooperation was not always or everywhere without problems.

⁴³ In both publications these are the mainline churches: Presbyterian, Catholic, Anglican, Methodist and Lutheran. When we speak here about 'mainline churches' we mean these churches.

⁴⁴ The relationship between colonizer and the r.c. church was strongly influenced by the relationship between the two in the mother country. So the relationship in the French colonies was sometimes more difficult than in the Belgian or Portuguese. On protestant side the relationships were, according to Haynes, more depending on several factors: the number of European colonists, the presence of rival churches, the presence and size of Islam and the attitude of the dominant christian group with regard to independence. See J. Haynes, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-51.

⁴⁵ Often these tensions were related to tensions between several rival churches, which tried to entice the colonizer to choices in their advantage.

⁴⁶ J. Haynes, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

⁴⁷ In many cases it depended especially on the persons involved on ecclesiastical as on nationalistic side.

⁴⁸ 'Nearly all African nationalist leaders were Christians (...) or 'Europeanized Africans'. See J. Haynes, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

After independence the separation between church and state has been more theory than practice as it already was in the colonial period. Numerous are the examples which prove that churchleaders and politicians were and are part of the (same) elite. Also religious leaders were and are part of the previous described networks, and so they are in all kinds of ways involved with the political elite.⁴⁹

Because of this situation the developments in the recent years have also disturbed the churchleaders. As part of the elite and as part of civil society they are affected by the crisis. Through the intensification and hardening of the crisis churchleaders have been forced to speak out openly and clearly about this crisis. "The point is that criticism of the government must be both vociferous and broad-based before senior religious leaders add their weight to it. If (...) religious leaders fail to join in attacks against a clearly unpopular government once they have reached a certain stage of tension it would no doubt suggest to ordinary people that they and the regime were as one; the result might well be popular criticism of the religious leaders themselves from keeping silent while others attack the government."⁵⁰ Until then many religious leaders were very reluctant to speak out openly about political and economic issues.

Especially the mainline churches have spoken in the last years in an increasing and very clear manner about democratisation, human rights and about the economic crisis. In several countries for instance this became clear in the fact that churchleaders got a big and active role in the process of democratisation.⁵¹ At the same time it has to be noticed that in several countries the credibility of ecclesiastical statements suffered a loss because of the difference between words and deeds. So the close relationship between christianity and politics in Liberia has not been able to avoid or stop the drama in this country. And also the letters from the Rwandan bishops' conference were not always credible because of the close links of some churchleaders with the regime. The message was all right but the messengers were not.⁵²

The role of the non-mainline churches is less clear. It is difficult to say something about these churches because there are several thousands of these churches.⁵³ This enormous diversity makes it very difficult to say something about these churches. But in general one can say that these churches have been less pronounced about today's situation. Most of these churches seem to be principally apolitical, although some of these churches have a past of resistance. Perhaps the reason for this attitude is their weaker position: they can't fall back on a broad (international) infrastructure. Also theologically they often are located at the fundamentalistic and conservative

⁴⁹ '(...) pragmatism dominates state-religious institution relations in Africa. The not especially surprising conclusion is that both religious and secular power-holders seek to manipulate political situations for personal and for corporate advantage.' J. Haynes, *op. cit.*, p. 103

⁵⁰ J. Haynes, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

⁵¹ Examples in this context are a.o. the national conferences in Togo, Benin and Zaire. In these countries churchleaders played a prominent role in the process of democratisation. They were acceptable to all political factions and parties because of their prestige and credibility, which was based on the fact that they tried to avoid getting involved in faction or party politics. At the same time they were no threat to the politicians because these churchleaders had no political ambitions.

⁵² See P. Gifford, 'Directed by the Hand of God': the Role of Liberian Christianity during the Civil War, pp. 276-291, and T.P. Longman, 'Christianity and Democratisation in Rwanda: Assessing Church Responses to Political Crisis in the 1990s', pp. 188-204, in P. Gifford (ed), *op. cit.*

⁵³ According to J. Haynes there are more than 20,000 of these churches in Africa.

wing of the spectrum.⁵⁴ But on local and personal level these churches can have a very big influence, also because they are characterized by a strong community building aspect.

To conclude it may be said that in today's African societies religion plays a major role and probably this role will increase. Religion in Africa seems more political, more militant and in many cases also more fundamentalistic than ever. Religion and consequently the churches seem to prosper with this crisis. They seem to fill a vacuum and to offer 'law and order' in the political and economic chaos, clarity and certainty in an uncertain situation. Maybe their position is also strengthened by the fact that the state has to curtail itself in the areas of health care and education, areas in which the churches are traditionally very active.

5. Theology of Reconstruction.

*Happiness seems so far off,
and peace, out of reach.
But I know that one day
we will find them.*

(From the song **Elédjiré** by Angelique Kidjo)

Within the mainline churches, the present day situation seems to give rise to a new theological paradigm. The present crisis in Africa is dealt with in an increasing number of articles written by African theologians. But theology cannot rest content at noting this crisis. On the contrary: theology and christianity ought to arrive at formulating an answer and opening up a new perspective, a perspective of hope. This is the context of the idea of 'reconstruction'. The theology of reconstruction may be circumscribed as a 'theology which lays a foundation for the construction of a new society'.⁵⁵

The roots of this new paradigm within African theology lie particularly in the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and it surfaced during an AACC-meeting in Nairobi in 1990.⁵⁶ Since then the idea of reconstruction has been taken up by a number of African theologians from various regions in Africa and has found expression in a number of publications. In the order of appearance we shall discuss publications by Ch. Villa-Vicencio (South Africa), K. Mana (Zaire) and J. Mugambi (Kenya). All these contributions come from AACC circles. The last

⁵⁴ 'As already suggested, followers of Christian fundamentalist churches generally believe that people's redemption and prosperity is in their own hands (or rather in God's hands and the individual's hands), and that expectations that government could or should supply all people's needs is misplaced. What this implies is that followers of such churches believe they should 'keep out of politics', because what happens on earth is all part of the continuing battle between the Devil and God for dominance. Consequently, secular rulers are not really to blame for what goes wrong.' J. Haynes, *op. cit.*, p. 204. But Haynes also urges to be careful to judge fundamentalism only as negative: see p. 228.

Also P. Gifford makes an appeal to be careful in this context when he refers to D. Stoll: 'He suggests that in the long run, charismatic Christianity (...) may be a greater force for political reform than liberation theology. Charismatic Christianity provides space in which people can take control of their own lives. Once they exercise control there, they can move to control the social and political realm.' P. Gifford (ed), *op. cit.*, p. 288.

⁵⁵ G. van 't Spijker, Theologie der reconstructie. een nieuw sleutelwoord in Afrika, in *Wereld en Zending*, 1993/2, p. 58.

⁵⁶ See J. Chipenda e.a., *L'Eglise d'Afrique. Pour une théologie de la reconstruction*, Série Le Défi Africain, no. 1, CETA, Nairobi, 1991. English version: *The Church of Africa: Towards a Theology of Reconstruction*, AACC, Nairobi, 1991.

publication which we shall treat comes from the Catholic tradition. For the Nigerian Spiritan E. Uzukwu has also taken up this theme, which he places in the context of the Synod of African Bishops.

5.1. Ch. Villa-Vicencio: Reconstructing South Africa.

In 1992 Villa-Vicencio published the book *A Theology of Reconstruction: Nation-Building and Human Rights*.⁵⁷ During the Apartheid Regime the author contributed to the so-called Black Theology, which represented liberation theology in a society organised on racism.

In this publication the author compares the present South-African situation to that of the people of Israel in the Bible. After its liberation from Apartheid, South Africa has entered a new period. Being a contextual theology, Black Theology has consequently also entered into a new phase. After the exodus and the liberation from Apartheid, the time has come to construct a new society. After its Exodus, the population of South Africa has arrived into a 'promised land' that must still be constructed from the heritage and the ruins resulting from the Apartheid period. In Villa-Vicencio's thinking according to the biblical tradition, the weak and exploited ought to be the norm for this reconstruction. This is the perspective from which theology must make its contribution to the construction of the new society. This contribution is essentially different from the one made by black liberation theology. It is now the task of church and theology, in collaboration with others, to search for ways which make the 'new country' an improvement on the old one. Whereas during the time of Apartheid it was the church's duty to make an evangelical 'No' heard, now the time has come for a constructive 'Yes'.

With this book Villa-Vicencio aimed at making a theological contribution from this point of view to the constitutional debate which was being conducted in South Africa at that particular point of time. For that reason the author restricted himself emphatically to post-Apartheid South Africa and to the discussion going on in the country about the new constitution.

Villa-Vicencio starts from the assumption that legislation plays a crucial role in the building and structuring of a just society, in which due attention is given to today's 'widows and orphans'. For it is the law which creates order and security and helps to resolve conflicts. In Villa-Vicencio's thinking right and religion must complement each other, for in contrast to legal security, religion offers society a perspective for the future together with openness to change. Right without religion leads to formalism and legal positivism, while religion without right leads to spiritualism.

Since legislation is a political process, it follows that the church and theology must get involved in politics. But it remains imperative that church and theology keep a critical distance from politics, since the (Apartheid)politics has often abused theology in order to maintain the status-quo. Biblical liberation is a sign of God's presence, but this liberation must also be translated into a political programme and legislation. If the church wants to be prophetic, she must not allow herself to be intimidated by the reality of society. Otherwise she runs the risk of denying the salvation-history aspect of her good news and church and theology threaten to become opium of the people. In order to be able to make a constructive contribution from theology, a critical social analysis is necessary. This makes this theology emphatically and consciously a contextual theology. It must have the courage to ask critical questions, for in lawgiving social values are embedded. Church and theology must commit themselves to those values which enable people to live in mutual respect; in formulating those values, the most

⁵⁷ Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992.

vulnerable must be the norm.

Having formulated those starting points, the author elaborates this in a research into the history and meaning of and conditions for a law-abiding society and human rights on the one hand and its relation with church and society on the other. Exactly because he makes the weakest the norm, he pleads for a greater role for social and economic human rights. Here Villa-Vicencio finds a dilemma: when individual freedom (as found in classical human rights) is given priority, equality suffers, while if equality is given priority, individual freedom tends to suffer.

Villa-Vicencio has no definitive answer to this dilemma, but he gives pointers. Human rights belong to the central notion of what it means to be human. Christians look at the same time towards what the traditions of their faith, doctrine and theology say about being human. From the Jewish-Christian tradition, this is exactly the fundamental attention to 'widows and orphans'. This gives theology the task together with other disciplines to search for ways to translate their understanding of human dignity into a political and economic ordering of society. Human rights too may not be dealt with uncritically, for human rights as such are not absolute, but God's will is. Furthermore he demands attention for the correcting influence which the African concept of humanity can have on the western liberalistic concept: the individual aspect may not be dissociated from the social and relational. This African view of humanity corresponds with christian teaching and tradition.

The author continues by giving much attention to the importance of the collapse of the Soviet Union and criticizes the ideology of free-market thinking, which now presents itself as 'the victor'. Though the author ultimately arrives at a plea for a social-democratic South Africa, he clearly intends to test the capitalistic and socialistic systems against the demands of the Gospel, which transcends both these ideologies.

In a postscript Villa-Vicencio finally offers both a description of the theology of reconstruction and some remarks concerning its method:

- It concerns a positive, constructive theology about social structures;
- It is not an exact science, but rather a creating and creative art with an 'open' ethics void of dogma;
- This theology must keep the biblical (eschatological) vision alive and reach beyond the present status quo;
- It is a very context-related theology, which uses historical and general insights to arrive at critical social ethics.

With regard to method, Villa-Vicencio discerns the following elements:

- Telling the truth: As a method this theology makes use of a critical, not ideological, social analysis, which is aimed at exposing relations of power, socio-economic relations and cultural values which are oppressive.
- Praxiology: It is a critical, theological reflection on praxis and in this way creates a theoretical framework.
- Inter-disciplinary and inter-faith: Analysis and framework must be inter-disciplinary and inter-religious.
- Open-ended: It is an ongoing process.
- Constructive: This theology attempts to give a constructive contribution with realistic solutions.
- Corporate process: It concerns a common process with special obligations (towards the poor and oppressed) and geared towards the welfare of all.
- Participatory and democratic: In this way this theology is by definition open to democratic participation.

In his words: 'A theology of reconstruction is a corporate theology, given to democratic participation, expressive of interdisciplinary and inter-faith dialogue in its social analysis and theoretical structures. It offers no final answer to the complex problems with which society is

confronted. As such it is open-ended, driven by an eschatological vision which demands more than a particular society offers at any given time. In brief, a theology of reconstruction is both **contextually responsible**, seeking to define the next logical step society is required to take at a given point in time, and **socially transcendent** in the sense of challenging society to reach forward to the social goals which form part of the social vision incorporated in the biblical metaphor of the reign of God.⁵⁸

5.2. K. Mana: Reconstructing Africa.

The Zairian Mana studied at the catholic Theological Faculty in Kinshasa and obtained a doctorate in philosophy and theology in Europe. In Europe he changed over to protestantism. In 1994 he published the book *Théologie africaine pour temps de crise. Christianisme et reconstruction de l'Afrique*.⁵⁹

The book is composed of two parts. In the first part Mana gives an overview of present-day African theology and its historic roots. But African theology has entered into a new phase because '[w]e have passed from a situation in which basically theological problems arose from a need for revolt (made concrete by the problem of cultural identity and political, social and economic liberation with regard to the western world) and we have moved towards a new vision of the problems of the continent. This vision is determined by the need for global thinking about reconstructing Africa'.⁶⁰ Because of this crisis in Africa theology has found itself faced with another mandate. In this situation the theology of reconstruction wants to go in search of a dynamic ethic which is able to lead Africa out of the present crisis and takes responsibility for this.

In the second part he goes deeper into the theology of reconstruction. Its need is determined by the present African reality. Making up the balance of thirty years of independence, he is forced to find that Africa is bankrupt, in every respect. For Mana thinks that Africa's bankruptcy also extends to its spirituality and morality. It is necessary to fight the fatality of this and to show the power of God's word and the grandeur of its utopism.⁶¹

As a challenge for theology he sees 'a political ethic which founds the project of building our societies upon the basis of humanity and starts from the Gospel as a power for change'.⁶² In this project making an analysis of the situation is as important as dialogue with other theologies and other ethical positions. Key words of this theology are incarnation (reacting to concrete situations), resistance, liberation and renewal. It concerns a process in which active work is done

⁵⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 280.

⁵⁹ Karthala, Paris, 1994. It is a revised and extended version of *Foie chrétienne, crise africaine et le reconstruction de l'Afrique*.

⁶⁰ Original French version: 'Nous sommes passés d'une situation où les problèmes théologiques de fond relevaient d'une existence d'insurrection idéologique (concrétisée par la problématique de l'identité culturelle et de la libération politique, sociale et économique face au monde occidental) à une nouvelle vision des problèmes du continent. Une vision déterminée par la nécessité d'une pensée globale pour la reconstruction de l'Afrique.', *op. cit.*, p. 10.

⁶¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 90.

⁶² Original French version: '...une éthique politique qui fonde le projet de bâtir nos sociétés sur les bases de l'humain, à partir de l'Evangile comme puissance de changement'. *Op. cit.*, p. 114.

for structural change. The utopian character of the christian ethics and conversion thereto can resolve the crisis. 'Can', because these solutions need not necessarily be or give the only solutions. That would smell of ideological pretensions.

Mana goes then in search for moments of crisis in the Bible. Here he identifies three so-called 'parabolas':

1- The first parabola -the original crisis- is in its turn differentiated in four moments of crisis:

a- Eden and the Fall: The human person lives in harmony with his world. But having failed to listen to God's word, he is driven out of paradise. As from now the human person must live in the historic reality. He longs back for paradise but has to give it hands and feet himself. His longing for paradise and its realisation in human history lie at the root of utopism.

b- Cain and Abel: This story deals with violence towards each other and the question whether we are each other's keeper. The problems concerning mutual respect and social responsibility are central in this part.

c- The Tower of Babel: The question here is the diversity of people, but in this reality of diversity, unity must be found.

d- The Flood: Here we are concerned with renewal through a sacred rest and attentive listening to God's word.

2- The second parabola, the socio-political one- shows two moments:

a- Exodus or the liberation from Egypt: Here we are concerned with liberation from oppression. This liberation is indissolubly linked with the utopism of the Promised Land.

b- The Promised Land: People must, however, build the new society with their own hands (construction).

Both for the coming about of liberation and for obtaining the Promised Land, human beings must do something. In other words: God's liberating activity coincides with the active engagement of people. The construction of the new society reveals itself as an ongoing struggle. It is the struggle between God and Baal, or the struggle between the ethic of the liberating God and the servile security of idols.

3- The third and last parabola is the one of spiritual and cultural change. This parabola extends from the return from the Babylonian Captivity to the destruction of the Temple. In this period the crisis is religious as well as political. This is made clear by the Roman occupation and the inner division of the Jewish people. Utopism becomes rigid in dogmatism and degenerates ultimately into negative apocalypics. The message of conversion of John the Baptist breaks through all this, bringing back both utopism and the importance of the here and now. The message and life of Jesus which follow do not only break through the existing spiritual crisis, but also break through cultural boundaries: they give a universal message, which is not restricted to the Jewish people.

After this Mana takes up again the theology of reconstruction in relation to present-day Africa. But in reality he repeats here what he has already indicated at the beginning of the second part.

5.3. J. Mugambi: Reconstructing by Renaming and Uniting.

Mugambi teaches at the University of Nairobi and is closely connected with AACC, of which he is an adviser. He is among those who contributed to the AACC-meeting in Nairobi of

1990 which laid down the main directives.⁶³ His contribution to this assembly and other articles have been collected and published under the title *From Liberation to Construction: African Christian Theology after the Cold War*⁶⁴. It consists of a collection of lectures on various topics. The introduction gives the most important points of reference of the lectures:

1- Ecumenism: Christianity in Africa has often a negative influence and its radiating power is reduced by division. Mugambi pleads for ecumenism.

2- Reconstruction: Social reconstruction is necessary in Africa, since with the ending of the Cold War a new era (The New World Order) has started for the continent of Africa and hence also for African theology.

3- Renaming: Mugambi sees an essential need to come to a renaming of Africa and by Africa, because Africa and its inhabitants have accepted to be ruled; responsibility, self-confidence and self-consciousness have therefore been taken from Africa and its inhabitants. The time has come for Africa and its inhabitants to take their destiny again into their own hands.

The book starts with a definition of the place of theology. Here Mugambi immediately introduces a new paradigm: reconstruction. For him reconstruction is almost the logical sequence to liberation. In this context, he points at the theme of reconstruction in the Bible as it emerges in the books of Jeremiah, Josiah, Haggai and Nehemiah. This reconstruction of Africa must come about at different levels: at the level of the individual but also at the cultural, ecclesial, political, economic, ethical and religious level. For this reason this theology of reconstruction demands a multi-disciplinary approach. In addition, this theology is contextual and geared toward an open dialogue with others.

The fact that the continent is in such a bad shape seems to be the great paradox. Has God turned his face away from Africa? This is a question which must be asked, for 'there is always the temptation to measure God's favour in terms of prosperity'.⁶⁵ Which direction is Africa to choose in this situation? 'Should Africa opt for Job's attitude and endure suffering, or for Nietzsche's nihilism and pursue 'enlightened self-interest' at any cost?'⁶⁶ How can Africa remain itself in the process of globalisation? Mugambi's answer is that Africa must renew itself by becoming responsible for itself and take its affairs into its own hands in a drive to self-reliance and hence self-definition: renaming.

Up to the present the churches have not been exemplary in this regard because of their competitiveness, which appears from their mission activities. This brings Mugambi to a criticism of the dependence of the African Churches on the West. Africa is more religious-minded than the West. Yet the West still feels obliged to send missionaries. Africa is a continent without boundaries for the West, into which western Churches and organisations enter without restriction. These behave in the same manner as the Nations of Europe did which, in the Berlin Conference in 1885, carved up Africa: decisions are taken without consulting Africa or its inhabitants. In a direct line with this, Mugambi pleads for a renewed pan-africanism. For if Africa wants to have a chance in the New World Order, then it must not only redefine and rename itself but also re-unite, as Europe is doing.

It is exactly the Churches which have the task of showing that there is a future and that the present problems can be overcome. In this context the key words are: faith, hope and

⁶³ See note 46.

⁶⁴ East African Educational Publishers, Nairobi, 1995.

⁶⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 35.

⁶⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 34.

charity. This 'three-in-one' must be indissolubly inter-connected and of this Christians must give a witness.

In addition, Africa is in need of a form of secularisation, namely a secularised, neutral state, as well as of a separation of powers. 'But at the same time we need the intensification of religious commitment in Africa, but of the type that leads to positive social reconstruction, not to passive piety.'⁶⁷

5.4. E. Uzukwu: Reconstructing the Church.

The Nigerian Spiritan E. Uzukwu in his book *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches*⁶⁸ takes up the paradigm of the church-as-family, such as it has been formulated by the African Synod of Bishops.⁶⁹ This paradigm he joins together with a second one: reconstruction. The end result is a book which in effect deals with the reconstruction of the African church.

This author too starts from the relations between the African reality and theology. Theology ought to take reality serious and to be a sign of hope in that reality. The Church has 'the mission of transforming society (promoting democracy, justice, peace, and human rights in church and society). She is the subject with a mandate to create an alternative society, the Kingdom which is to come being already present in her midst through her witness.'⁷⁰

The present crisis is, according to Uzukwu, in essence a cultural crisis, wherein Africans are both victim and perpetrator. He sees the theology of reconstruction therefore as a theology of inculturation. His thesis is that 'the retrieval and modernization of our African cultural matrix is the necessary route toward healing the political, economic, social and religious misery in Africa.'⁷¹ And 'the solution to Africa's problems is through mobilizing and harnessing its internal resources instead of depending on external aid.' Africans must 'define themselves'.⁷²

The author goes on to describe traditional African society and the destructive influence on that society of slavery and colonisation. Also in present-day international relations there seems to be room for the strong only. This makes ethical principles a necessity in international politics and economics.

The reconstruction of Africa and the church must be done on the foundation of democratic principles and human rights. In this process the relational concept of human beings such as we encounter it in Africa should play a decisive role so as to get away from the western emphasis on the individual. The western and African appreciation of the individual must be brought into harmony. This western emphasis on the individual has also had its effect upon christian ethics, which have been elaborated and are given attention especially on the individual, personal level. As a result christian behaviour and salvation have been too much privatized.

⁶⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 150.

⁶⁸ Orbis, New York, 1996.

⁶⁹ See *The African Synod: Documents, Reflections, Perspectives*, AFJN/Orbis, New York, 1996.

⁷⁰ E. Uzukwu, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

⁷¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁷² *Op. cit.*, p. 9.

There is a clear mandate for the church here: respect for rights and freedoms within the church would be the best witness for change of society. It is imperative in this regard that ethnic boundaries are surmounted. 'Africa must unite' and must work towards 'the construction of one nation'.⁷³

Uzukwu goes on to deal with the internal relations within the Roman Catholic Church. That the one Church takes many forms we learn from the New Testament and the first centuries of Christianity. Local churches share with each other but at the same time they are autonomous. Also in the present international church-relations a re-appraisal must be made, for African churches are too strictly controlled by a colonial administration, namely the Church of Rome. The church-as-family model shows that the Church is the family of God. Thus the caring and warming aspect of the African family is brought into play. But, Uzukwu warns, this may not be a patriarchal, ethnic family.

The relations of Africa with the rest of the world must be re-defined on the basis of self-reliance, mutuality, solidarity and inter-dependence. Africa must re-define her needs. 'The continent should become self-centred and work for its own interests instead of responding simply to the interests of the West.'⁷⁴ Being a network of communication and of people, the church must mobilize these people to come to a constructive collaboration (ecumenism). Thus Uzukwu thinks of a boycott of banks and, related to this, of a 'shift from the forgiveness of African debts to the payment of the debt owed to Africa'⁷⁵ which was incurred by the slave trade.

This autonomy must also become effective in church relations. In this context Uzukwu takes up the idea of the seventies of a moratorium, of which he is in favour. In his opinion relations of help are at the same time relations of control, in which the giver controls the receiver. The author is convinced that African churches 'must depend on their own spiritual and material resources'.⁷⁶ This statement is followed by a critical evaluation of the way of operation of many orders and congregations which are engaged in missionary activity in Africa. The manifold gifts of the Spirit should at last be recognized, together with the pluriformity which these imply. The future of Africa lies with the small christian communities and with a church which is collegial instead of hierarchical. The leadership which this requires is one of listening to each other. This is a form of leadership which connects with the traditional African palaver.

5.5. Conclusions.

From the above it becomes evident that the theology of reconstruction arises from a taking of responsibility by the church or individual christians in a situation of (political, economic and social) crisis which causes suffering to many in Africa. The theology of reconstruction can be seen as a sequel to the African theology of liberation. Notwithstanding the proper angle of approach of each theologian, there are a number of agreements, which can lead to a characterization of the theology of reconstruction:

We are dealing with a **constructive, future orientated contribution** made by church

⁷³ *Op. cit.*, p. 41.

⁷⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 72.

⁷⁵ Uzukwu is more radical than the African bishops in their letter about forgiving Africa's debts. See 'Forgive Us Our Debts', in *The African Synod*, pp. 114-116.

⁷⁶ E. Uzukwu, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

and theology to society. The present situation in Africa is brought into relation with the **eschatological and prophetic** aspect of the christian message and one's own responsibility. Key-words are concepts like utopism, and the Kingdom of God. The ideas of democracy and human rights are related to this. The relationship between church and theology on the one hand and the state or society on the other, is the central focus for reflection. The point of departure is a **critical analysis** of the situation, which makes this theology **contextual**. This theology is open towards the contributions made by other denominations. We can speak of a **ecumenical and multidisciplinary dialogue**. She is geared towards a **social ethic**, which gives attention to political and economic relations.

The theology of reconstruction is an appealing theology. It appeals to the responsibility of everybody, the respect for everybody, the tradition of every culture and the participation of everybody. The starting point of this theology is the political and economic situation in present-day Africa but this does not mean that the (in)cultural aspect has disappeared in this new theological paradigm. Because culture is hidden behind and is part of the political and economic decisions, problems and solutions.

Next there are differences between the various theologians:

- Villa-Vicencio writes very emphatically entirely from and for the South African situation, which differs considerably from the rest of Africa. South Africa is faced with the challenge to build up a new society after the Apartheid regime. The other authors write from a situation in which they still have to overcome the political crisis. Villa-Vicencio's publication is also more concrete, profound and inter-disciplinary as compared to the others.
- The merit of Mana is that he reads the bible from the point of view of 'a crisis of society' while aiming at reconstruction.
- Mugambi and Uzuoku strongly emphasize the need for Africa to re-define itself, which means that it must reappraise its needs and relationships. To this they attach a renewed pan-africanism.
- With Uzuoku this leads, moreover, to a consideration of taking up again the moratorium idea, as it emerged in the seventies.

6. The Challenges.

But I strongly submit that there is no cause for the so-called Afro-pessimism; that our continent is disaster-prone and produces donor-fatigue. Yes, we have massive problems. But they are not unsurmountable obstacles. They are challenges and we have the resources with which to confront and overcome them.

(D. Tutu)

In the introduction to this article the statement was made that the relationship between the various articles in this collection is perhaps not immediately evident, but that it really does exist. He who re-reads these articles now will see that all authors implicitly or explicitly ask for a **social ethic**⁷⁷, in which values are found which help to construct society. It is exactly with answering this question that the theology of reconstruction is concerned. Arriving at a social ethic which is professed not only with words but also with deeds is the great and difficult challenge and mandate.

The traditional African values have been neglected and have been altered in a negative way by external influences. It is, however, not possible to undo history. At the same time an

⁷⁷ This new social ethic includes an new political and economic ethic.

uncritical and nostalgic longing back to traditional African society is undesirable, since that society too was not ideal. It is more important to search for concrete possibilities within African traditional culture(s) which can also today may make a positive contribution without losing from sight the present reality. It is a matter of preserving what is good and abandoning what is bad. In this context 'renewal' would seem to be a good concept, as it indicates that one takes up the old but not without changes and adaptations if required. Or as St. Paul says: 'Put all things to the test: keep what is good'.⁷⁸ There is need for an **honest resourcing**. This cannot be done without a critical examination of both the Western and the proper African culture. In this regard Magesa says rightly: 'Critique of culture is, however, a fundamental requirement in any struggle for human liberation. Quite often cultures contain systematic elements detrimental to the human dignity of individuals or groups. Thus they are diametrically opposed to the Good News of Jesus Christ'.⁷⁹

Exactly for the churches a mandate and a possibility exist in the area of social ethics, for Villa-Vicencio says rightly in this regard that the church may not lose her eschatological and prophetic aspect if she wants to do justice to her message of Good News. This touches upon the essence of being church and of being christian.

In this social ethic a large place appears to be reserved for **democracy and human rights**. These are important issues, for the danger exists that these ideas are being defined exclusively by the West. In her search for African democratic relationships, in which human rights connect as much as possible with African traditions, the church will have to go into dialogue with politics and herself. The church can and may not withdraw into the sacristy. On the contrary, she will have to follow critically developments in the state and the society all the time. For is the church not responsible primarily to God and not to the state? The question is to what extent churches are able and willing to take a critical look at their relations with the state itself. Confrontations with the state are not excluded when the churches take a constructive but critical stand vis à vis the state. Ecclesial gains and securities may be put at a risk. Does one want and dare to do this? History perhaps does not give much ground for optimism, but the same history shows also that it can be done. Once more: the church will have to be aware that her credibility is at stake. For evangelical words without evangelical deeds undermine largely her witness of and her faith in the Kingdom of God. B. Mbuy-Beya summarizes very well: 'Africa is struggling to be freed from fear, hunger, racism, and oppression, be it economic, political or religious. But the answers won't come from theological treatises on liberation alone. The Gospel -a message of liberation- will take root in African soil only because women and men aren't afraid of dirtying their hands in the earth or risking their lives in the defence of the poor and helpless'.⁸⁰

Another challenge that asks our attention in this social ethic is the role of **ethnicity**. Here we are faced with the gigantic task of breaking through and surmounting ethnic thinking. This doesn't touch only African society as such, because within church organisations also elements of ethnicity may be found. Hence both the positive and the negative aspects of ethnicity require extra attention. As a leading thought those other words of St. Paul could serve: 'So there is no difference between Jews and Greeks, between slaves and free men, between men and women; you are all one in union with Christ now'.⁸¹

⁷⁸ 1 Thess. 5:21.

⁷⁹ L. Magesa, 'Differences that Bind the Liberation of Women in Africa', in *Afer*, Vol. 35 (1993) no. 1, p. 45.

⁸⁰ B. Mbuy-Beya, 'Women in the Churches in Africa, in *The African Synod*, p. 183.

⁸¹ Gal. 3:28.

It is important that all this be done on an **inter-disciplinary** basis. For a good deal the result of this search for an up to date and relevant social ethic depends on a good, critical analysis. In this respect there appear to be great shortcomings, which makes it easy to hide behind generalities, clichés and excuses in order in this way to shift (co)responsibility. For this reason churches and theologians should make a more extensive use of the methods and results of other scientific disciplines. Here one thinks of disciplines like anthropology, politicology, economics, sociology and law.⁸²

In this search, which touches upon the heart of the Gospel, the churches can play an important role because of the infrastructure and means at their disposal. Concretely this could be expressed in an extension of research into and attention given to social ethics and bringing this into their **training programmes**. Furthermore this should reflect in their preaching and pastoral activities. It is probably more important that not only the church authorities become more attentive to this, but that training programmes be developed and offered to the whole church community. Too often in the past it was exactly the base which was forgotten or neglected. The **participation of all** the laity must be encouraged and promoted, for every christian has a responsibility for his/her fellow man and for God. The modern media, like radio, would be able to fulfil an important role here.

Next to inter-disciplinary action, potentialities of the different churches must be correlated. Especially Akordor and Mugambi make the remark, and rightly so, that the churches have introduced new lines of demarcation. The plea of theologians within the theology of reconstruction for an **ecumenical attitude** is therefore very much justified. The churches make their message entirely incredible if they continue to emphasize their differences in dogma, while in the meantime God's People in Africa suffer and weep in a situation of fundamental injustice.

There are two groups in African society which deserve extra attention. The first of these are women, who are faced with a double oppression. They find themselves in a difficult situation not only as a result of the crisis in Africa, but also as victims of sexism. The second group are the young. Not only do they represent the future of Africa, they also constitute the largest section of the African population.

The issue of a social ethic is not only a task for African churches and African christians, but most certainly also of their sister churches and fellow christians in the West. Nor can they withdraw from this issue and from their responsibilities for it. For the Western churches are part of the problem. Partly through their functioning in the past they are responsible for the present-day situation in Africa and its churches. The past makes the churches into accomplices. In addition they are church in states and societies which form part of international relations which give Africa and its inhabitants little opportunity to arrive at a dignified existence of full humanity. The **globalisation** of our reality makes it impossible, undesirable and immoral to neglect Africa and her inhabitants.

How do the churches of the West react when in their own countries national and international political and economic issues are at stake? Do they take their evangelical responsibility seriously where it concerns relations with Africa? The debt crisis and the arms trade are clear cases in point. Also in western churches these questions are often the concern of small groups which take them to heart. What possibilities do western churches create to enlarge the number

⁸² Unfortunately, also the most (in this article mentioned) publications about the theology of reconstruction lack this concrete and profound analysis.

of those who take responsibility among their members? Do they not too easily satisfy themselves with donations to christian charity instead of making a contribution to biblical justice?

But it is not only in their own countries that western churches have an influence. In Africa too they still have a large say thanks to their assistance in material means and personnel. To what extent is the voice of Africans really taken seriously in these matters? It would be too easy to push aside the demands for independence or for a moratorium without serious dialogue with the persons concerned and to continue as usual. Do not the western churches export their values and norms to Africa without any **self-criticism**? To what extent are church training programmes and African religious communities not just a copy, sometimes even of a western past which is transplanted to Africa while in the West it functions no longer? Briefly: are the western churches willing and capable of being allies of their African brothers and sisters in word and deed and allowing themselves to take instructions from their African brothers and sisters? Do the western churches take the message seriously which says: "Today there is only one way you can help us, and that is by somehow helping us to discover how to do things our way. You must help us doing things our own way, even if you are certain there is a better way to do it. And when what we have built badly comes crashing about our ears, if you are with us still, you will help us pick up the pieces, and you will help us find a better way to build. And finally, you must not be surprised if what you do for us is not only not acknowledged but resented, resisted, rejected."⁸³

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